

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Our Aim

Bounce Theatre is committed to quality, accountability, and working openly to build trust and respect. We embrace a culture of continuous improvement by listening and responding to the views of our participants, funders, and stakeholders, and in particular by responding positively to complaints, and by putting mistakes right.

Therefore, we aim to ensure that:

- making a complaint is as easy as possible;
- we welcome feedback and suggestions;
- we treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction which calls for prompt acknowledgement, and a thorough and considered response;
- we deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially;
- we respond in the right way - for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken; and
- we learn from complaints, use them to improve our practice, and review annually our complaints policy and procedures.

We recognise that many concerns will be raised informally and dealt with quickly.

Our aims are to:

- resolve informal concerns quickly;
- keep matters proportional to the nature of the complaint; and
- enable mediation between the complainant and the individual to whom the complaint has been referred.

This policy ensures that we welcome feedback and provide guidelines for dealing with complaints from members of the public about our work, staff, and volunteers.

2. Definitions

A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction, however it is expressed. This would include complaints expressed face-to-face, via a phone call, in writing, via email, or any other format. All staff should have sufficient knowledge to be able to identify an “expression of dissatisfaction” even when the word “complain” or “complaint” is not used.

3. Complaints

The formal complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently, and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

4. Responsibilities

Bounce Theatre's responsibility will be to:

- acknowledge the formal complaint in writing;
- respond within a stated period of time;
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint; and

- take action where appropriate.

A complainant's responsibility is to:

- bring their complaint in writing to Bounce Theatre's attention as soon as possible and normally within eight weeks of the issue arising;
- where appropriate, raise concerns promptly and directly with a member of staff in Bounce Theatre;
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date;
- allow Bounce Theatre a reasonable time to deal with the matter, and
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond Bounce Theatre's control.

5. Confidentiality

Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and Bounce Theatre maintain confidentiality. However, the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (with each complaint judged on its own facts). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

6. Complaints Procedure

Written records must be made Bounce Theatre at each stage of the procedure.

6.1 Stage 1

In the first instance, staff member(s) must establish the seriousness of the complaint. If concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

6.2 Stage 2

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the complainant should be advised that a formal complaint can be submitted and the following procedure should be explained to them. It may sometimes be appropriate for a different member of Bounce Theatre staff, preferably a member of the management team or Artistic Director, to make this explanation.

The following steps should be taken for formal complaints:

- 6.2.1. A formal complaint can be made either verbally or in writing. If in writing the complainant should be sure to include:

- Their contact details;
- When and where the incident surrounding the complaint occurred;
- Who was involved;
- What happened in as much detail as possible;
- What the complainant would like to happen as a result of their complaint and what the resolution might be.

If verbally, a statement should be taken by a member of the management team or the Artistic Director. The above detail should be recorded.

- 6.2.2. In all cases, the complaint must be passed on to Lauren Purser (Company Manager) or Louise Pendry (Artistic Director). In the event of a complaint about the Company Manager or the Artistic Director the complaint should be passed to Kirsten Hutton (Company Director).

- 6.2.3. The Company Manager, Artistic Director, or Company Director, depending on the nature of the complaint, must acknowledge the complaint in writing within one calendar week of receiving it.
- 6.2.4. One of the above will investigate the complaint. Any conclusions reached should be discussed with the staff member involved and their line manager.
- 6.2.5. The person making the complaint will receive a response based on the investigation within four weeks of the complaint being received. If this is not possible then a letter must be sent explaining why and giving new timescales for response.

6.3 Stage 3

If the complainant is not satisfied with the final response from Bounce Theatre they may request, in writing, that the complaint be re-examined and investigated by an alternative member of Bounce Theatre staff, should someone be available who is not involved in the case so as to prevent objective assessment. They will respond, within four weeks from the date of the re-examination request, in writing. Their decision will be final.

7.0 Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

In most cases, dealing with complaints will be a straightforward process; however, in a minority of cases, the complainant may act in a manner that is deemed unacceptable. There may be scenarios when responding to abusive, persistent, or vexatious complaints and complainants is beyond the scope of points 1-6 outlined above.

Those identified will be treated consistently, honestly, and proportionately while ensuring that other participants, staff, stakeholders, and Bounce Theatre as a whole, suffer no detriment.

Complainants may act in a way that is considered abusive, unreasonably persistent, or vexatious and by doing so it may hinder Bounce Theatre's ability to investigate their complaint or the complaints of others. This behaviour may occur at any time before, during or after a complaint has been investigated.

The time spent on dealing with all complaints should be proportionate to the nature of the complaint and consistent with the outcome that is being sought being realistic and achievable.

7.1 Definition of Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour

It should be noted that raising a formal complaint about any aspect of Bounce Theatre does not in itself constitute unreasonably persistent behaviour and neither do complainants who escalate through all stages of the relevant complaints procedure or those who express criticism about the complaints process itself.

“For us, unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants are those complainants who, because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with an organisation, hinder the organisation's consideration of their, or other people's, complaints”.

7.2 Examples of Unreasonably Persistent Behaviour

This list is not exhaustive, nor does one single characteristic on its own imply that the person will be considered as being in this category:

- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of help.

- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints investigation process.
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of Bounce Theatre's jurisdiction or within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Denying or changing statements made at an earlier stage.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage.
- Raising many detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are all answered.
- Submitting falsified documents from themselves or others.
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with various members of staff and/or organisations.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous council staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses.
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations, which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.
- Refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

7.3 Examples of Abusive and/or Vexatious Complainants

Bounce Theatre will take steps to protect its staff from participants who are behaving in a way which is considered abusive and/or vexatious. This may include physical or verbal abuse and could include the following (however this list is not exhaustive):

- Speaking to the member of staff in a derogatory manner which causes offence.
- Swearing, either verbally or in writing despite being asked to refrain from using such language.
- Using threatening language towards Bounce Theatre staff, other participants, members of the public nearby, or venue staff which provokes fear.
- Repeatedly contacting a member of staff regarding the same matter which has already been addressed.

7.4 Managing Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

This policy may be invoked if the Bounce Theatre considers that a complainant has behaved in a manner which is deemed unreasonable (see above). Bounce Theatre may take any actions against a complainant that it considers to be reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.

These actions may be any of the following:

- Where the complainant tries to reopen an issue that has already been considered through policy procedures 1-6 above, they will be informed in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.
- Where a decision on the complaint has been made, the complainant should be informed that future correspondence will be read and placed on file, but not acknowledged, unless it contains important new information.
- Requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff and informing the complainant that if they do not keep to these arrangements, any further correspondence that does not highlight any significantly new matters will not necessarily be acknowledged and responded to, but will be kept on file.

7.5 Matters to Consider Before Taking Action

Consideration should be given to whether any further action is necessary, such as if it is known or suspected that the complainant has any special needs then referring them to support services who may advocate for and assist the complainant with their communication with Bounce Theatre.

Staff must be satisfied before taking any action as defined by this policy that the complainant's individual circumstances have been taken into account, including such issues as age, disability, gender, race, and religion or belief.

7.6 Imposing Restrictions

In the first instance Bounce Theatre will contact the complainant either by phone or in writing to explain why this behaviour is causing concern, and ask them to change this behaviour. Bounce Theatre will explain what actions may be taken if the behaviour does not change. Actions may be to bar any further participation in Bounce Theatre activities.

If the complainant continues with the unreasonable behaviour Bounce Theatre will contact the complainant in writing to explain:

- why this decision has been taken;
- what action Bounce Theatre will be taking; and
- the duration of that action.

Where the behaviour is so extreme or it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, participants, venue staff, or the general public, Bounce Theatre will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the Police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

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