
Complaints Policy for BHS Qualifications and Assessments

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Please note: This document is uncontrolled once printed. Please check with the BHS Education Team for the most up to date version.

1. Introduction

The British Horse Society (BHS) is committed to making sure all its activities are conducted fairly, transparently, objectively and free from bias. Arrangements for the effective management of complaints are integral to this. We listen to all views and feedback received, welcoming both positive and constructive feedback, so that we can continue to improve the services we offer.

2. Scope and applicability

This policy is for BHS customers and stakeholders who wish to complain about the service provided by the BHS during the delivery of a BHS assessment and/or qualification. The complaints policy addresses all aspects other than appeals regarding assessment decisions and quality assurance. This is part of the Appeals Policy for BHS Qualifications and Assessments.

This policy applies to:

- Assessments organised by the BHS Education Team. This includes qualifications awarded by the BHS and BHSQ. Qualifications in scope are Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, Stage 4, BHSI, Fellowship and Coaching4All.
- Personal Development Qualifications (PDQ) delivered by the BHS Changing Lives Through Horses Team (CLTH) and awarded by BHSQ.

If you want to report a safeguarding concern please refer to our website for [where to go for help](#). You can also contact the BHS Safeguarding Team direct:

Telephone: 02476 840746

Email: safeguarding@bhs.org.uk | Confidential Email: cpleadofficer@bhs.org.uk

This policy does not apply to any other activity that falls outside of assessment and qualification delivery as stated above. For example, making a complaint against a BHS Approved Centre, CLTH Approved Centre or Accredited Professional Coach. This policy does not apply to the delivery of any recreational product or other education delivery program such as Challenge Awards, Horse Explorers, Pony Stars, Progressive Riding Tests or Changing Lives Through Horses. This policy does not apply to any other service, event or training delivered by The British Horse Society. Please refer to the BHS's [Raising a Concern Policy](#) if you wish to raise a concern or complaint about a service outside the scope of this policy.

This policy is for:

- Learners and Candidates
- Assessors, Internal Quality Assurers and Assessor Mentors
- Approved assessment centres and PDQ centres (and their workforce)
- Trainers
- BHS employees
- Others as relevant.

3. Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this policy is to give relevant guidance for making a complaint. It will detail how complaints are managed within the delivery of BHS assessments and qualifications.

This document will:

- Define what is meant by a complaint.
- Provide examples where a complaint may arise.
- Explain how a complaint can be made to the BHS.
- Establish a clear complaints procedure.
- Ensure all complaints are responded to and dealt with fairly and in a timely manner.
- Provide public confidence in the BHS's ability to be open, objective and impartial.
- Outline how to take a complaint for regulated qualifications further when this policy has been exhausted.

It is useful to refer to the following documents and policies when reading this:

- [Whistleblowing](#)
- [Appeals](#)
- [BHSQ Complaints Policy](#)

4. Terms and definitions

A **complaint** is an 'expression of dissatisfaction' about a standard of service that is unacceptable to the person(s) and/or organisation(s) that has been affected.

The **complainant** is the person lodging the complaint representing themselves, an organisation or someone else.

Learner is anyone training for a BHS or PDQ qualification. This includes candidates, students and trainees.

An **assessor** is contracted to the BHS to make assessment decisions at BHS assessments. For clarity, those who undertake the role of assessor for the Personal Development Qualifications will be referred to as the **PDQ assessor**. PDQ assessors are not contracted to the BHS.

BHS assessments refer to those delivered for Stages 1-4, BHSI, Fellowship and Coaching4All qualifications only.

Approved assessment centre is any location where an assessment delivered by the BHS Education Team is taking place. For clarity, and for the purpose of this document, any location where Personal Development Qualifications are being delivered will be referred to as a **PDQ centre**.

British Horse Society Qualifications (BHSQ) is the awarding organisation for the British Horse Society. They are recognised and regulated by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) in England, SQA Accreditation in Scotland, Qualifications Wales (QW) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland.

5. Who can make a complaint

A complaint may be lodged when an individual feels that the standard or service provided by the BHS is unacceptable, during the delivery of BHS, BHSQ or PDQ qualifications and assessments.

Complaints can be made to the BHS by any person or organisation that has been directly affected. A complaint can be made on their behalf (a third party) if written permission from the individual has been received by the BHS.

If the person affected is under 18 (or under 16 years of age if residing in Scotland), a complaint can be made by someone on their behalf (a third party) without written permission from the person affected.

For any complaints made by a third party, the person affected may be contacted as part of the investigation.

A complaint may relate to:

- Failure to provide an adequate standard of service.
- A BHS employee
- A representative of the BHS during an assessment including:
 - Assessors and PDQ Assessors
 - Approved assessment centres and PDQ centres
 - Internal Quality Assurers
 - Any other BHS representative at a BHS assessment for example, Assessor Mentors.
- Failure to follow guidelines and/or timelines.
- Disagreement where a decision has been made by the BHS regarding delivery of an assessment or qualification, but not the assessment process. Disagreements with the assessment process are to be raised via the [Appeals policy](#).
- Bias or unfair treatment.
- Unprofessional behaviour and/or conduct.

This list is an example. Each complaint is different and will be considered on an individual basis.

6. How to make a complaint

If a complaint is regarding the service received at an assessment, complaints must be received within 30 days of the assessment date.

In each process outlined in this section, the complainant should contact, or will be contacted by, the relevant BHS Team relating to their concern. Contact details are on the first page of this policy.

If the complaint is regarding an assessment or qualification delivered by the BHS Education Team, the complainant should contact the BHS Education Team.

If the complaint is regarding a PDQ assessment or qualification delivery the complainant should contact the BHS CLTH Team.

The BHS will not consider anonymous complaints.

If you require support or assistance to lodge your complaint please contact us, we will always be able to help.

We are committed to providing a professional and fair service to everyone we work with. In return we ask that customers respect our BHS employees. We will not tolerate threatening, abusive, or violent behaviour. No BHS employee is required to deal with any such customer, either face-to-face, over the phone or in correspondence.

6.1 Informal process

The BHS aims to resolve a complaint as swiftly as possible. In the first instance the complainant should contact the BHS for an informal discussion regarding the concern or dissatisfaction. The BHS may then be able to resolve the issue by providing an explanation, clarity, an apology and/or further course of action.

Where the BHS is unable to resolve the complaint, the complainant will be advised to submit a formal complaint to facilitate a thorough investigation.

6.2 Formal process

6.2.1 Phase One

All complaints must be submitted in writing and include the following information:

- Name, address, and contact details of the complainant. If the complainant is a third party, name address and contact details of the person they are representing are also required.
- The qualification or assessment the complaint refers to.
- A full description of the complaint including:
 - the specific nature of the complaint
 - when it happened
 - the sequence of events
 - persons/organisations involved
 - any witnesses who are able to support the complaint.
- Copies of any documentation and evidence associated with the complaint.
- The desired action or response sought for resolution.
- If appropriate, any information regarding previous attempts for a resolution.

Complaints may be submitted in writing [via our online form](#), via post or email (contact details on the front of this policy).

The complainant may appoint someone else to act on their behalf. Should a complaint be submitted by a third party, permission from the person they are acting on behalf of must be submitted in addition to the above (unless the person affected is under 18).

The BHS will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within five working days. A log of all correspondence, documentation and conversations will be retained by the BHS.

The BHS will investigate the complaint, where all evidence and documentation will be scrutinised and evaluated. To conduct a comprehensive investigation, information may need to be disclosed to third parties, such as assessors or centres. Where additional evidence or documentation is required, the BHS will discuss this with the complainant.

The BHS will provide a written response to the complainant when a decision regarding the outcome of the complaint has been made.

The response will describe:

- The action taken to investigate the complaint.
- Conclusions from the investigation.
- Outcome of the complaint.
- Where required, action taken as a result to change or improve processes and procedures.

The BHS aims for an outcome to be reached within 20 working days of the complaint being received, however depending on the nature of the complaint, this may take longer to ensure a fair and thoroughly considered outcome. The complainant will be provided with an update including revised anticipated timescales should the BHS need to extend the investigation period.

If the complaint is about an employee of the BHS, they will not take part in any review and responsibility for the investigation will be directed to their respective manager, another senior BHS employee or a representative of the BHS, for example an Internal Quality Assurer, as appropriate.

6.2.2 Phase Two

To appeal a Phase One outcome, the complainant must submit their appeal within 10 working days to the relevant BHS Team, following receipt of the Phase One outcome.

Escalation to Phase Two may also be instigated by the BHS where they are unable to resolve the complaint.

The BHS will appoint an Independent Review Panel to investigate further. The panel will be made up of a minimum of two with at least one person external to the BHS Team that the complaint is about. There is no limit to the number in the panel.

The Independent Review Panel will:

- Investigate the complaint.
- Review all evidence and correspondence.
- Ensure processes and procedures have been fairly and consistently applied.
- Ensure equitable decisions have been reached.

Where additional evidence or documentation is required, the BHS will request this with the complainant.

The Independent Review Panel aims for an outcome to be reached within 30 working days of being appointed. The Panel will notify the complainant within ten working days of the final decision being reached.

Once a complaint has been investigated and an outcome has been reached, the complaint will be closed by the BHS. Without further substantial and objective evidence there will be no further investigation.

The decision of the Independent Review Panel is final. However, if the complainant remains dissatisfied then referral to BHSQ may be appropriate (see Taking a complaint further).

7. Taking a complaint further

Where the complaint relates to a regulated qualification and the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome and the concern is still not resolved, the matter may be escalated to the Awarding Organisation, BHSQ. BHSQ will only consider complaints where BHS's own complaints process has been exhausted. BHSQ's Complaints Policy is available [on their website](#).

Contact details for BHSQ.
 Telephone: 02476 840544
 Email: enquiries@bhsq.co.uk

8. Outcome from investigations

A complaint made against the BHS may be unfounded. In these circumstances the complainant will be made aware of the situation and that no further action will be taken. While many complaints are made through genuine concern, there are an unfortunate number which are malicious and are intended to harm the reputation of the Society, an individual or a stakeholder. If a complaint is found to be malicious, the complainant may be found liable for the cost of the investigation and any expenses incurred.

Where the investigation highlights flaws, errors or failures within the BHS's processes, procedures and/or guidance, all reasonable steps and appropriate action will be taken to prevent a reoccurrence.

This may involve:

- Contacting other learners who have been affected.
- Mitigation as far as possible where failures cannot be corrected.
- Recalling incorrect certificates.
- Implementing enhanced Internal Quality Assurance activity.
- Imposing actions on the employee. If the investigation highlights a need for further training or awareness this will be provided. In the event of their being anything that requires further exploration under a formal BHS People Policy, this will be discussed between the employee and their Line Manager.
- Imposing actions on the assessor, PDQ assessor, assessment centre or PDQ centre as appropriate.
- Updating policy and procedure guidance and manuals to provide clarity.
- Informing relevant parties or departments within the BHS.

- Consulting with BHSQ to request External Quality Assurance activity.

The BHS also provides an annual return for BHSQ regarding complaints concerning regulated qualifications.

9. Confidentiality

The BHS adheres to General Data Protection Regulation and will treat all complaints sensitively and in confidence. While your identity as the complainant is usually confidential, there are some occasions where this cannot be guaranteed. By the very nature of some investigations, your identity may become apparent. Please discuss this with us if you have concerns.

Information regarding complaints, reviews and investigations concerning regulated qualifications will need to be provided to BHSQ as part of an annual return. They may also be shared during the investigation depending on the nature of the complaint. The information may need to be shared with regulators and other organisations, if requested.

The BHS will respect a person's anonymity where requested, however depending on the nature of the complaint this may not be possible. The complainant will be notified in this instance.

8. Record keeping

The BHS must maintain records of all complaints for audit and monitoring purposes. This includes:

- Name, address and contact details of the complainant.
- Relationship with the BHS.
- Date reported.
- Assessment type, date and location (if applicable).
- Nature of complaint.
- Any persons/organisations involved
- Supporting documents and/or evidence.
- Action taken to investigate complaint.
- Conclusions and outcome from the investigation.
- Members of the Independent Review Panel, if applicable.

Data will be processed to manage and resolve the complaint. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

All complaints will be recorded securely on a central register and monitored. The information provided will be used solely for the purpose of managing our complaints process. We will retain the information for a period of three months after the complaint is closed, in case further issues come to light. After that point, we anonymise complaint records, to provide statistical and quality assurance information for the Society.

Please see the BHS Privacy notice (www.bhs.org.uk/privacy) for further information about how we use personal data.