

Complaints Procedure

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Complaints Procedure

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1. Purpose

This policy outlines how complaints made to the Western Equestrian Society (WES) will be received, assessed, and managed. It ensures that members, volunteers, WES Professionals, and governance role-holders can raise concerns safely and that all parties are treated fairly.

Complaints are a natural part of a functioning organisation. This procedure exists to support **transparency, impartiality, and resolution**, not to assign blame. It also protects individuals against unfair treatment, malicious complaints, or unclear processes.

The WES Constitution makes clear that Membership is a privilege not a right, application for which shall be made on the correct form and by fees and procedures prescribed by the Society. Membership or applications therefore may be terminated or rejected by Council of the Society for reason that the said Council may feel are detrimental to the interest, policies, programmes, objects or even harmonious relationship of the Society and its members.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to complaints involving:

- WES Council members
- Extended Council (e.g. Officers, Area Reps, Show Co-ordinator, Youth Officer, Education Officer)
- WES Professionals (approved instructors)
- WES members acting in an official Society capacity (e.g. clinic organisers, show volunteers)

It does **not** cover:

- Safeguarding concerns (these must be referred to the Youth Officer or designated safeguarding lead)
- General feedback or service dissatisfaction (these are best raised informally or via the Secretary)

3. Definitions

- **Complaint:** An expression of concern about the behaviour, decision, or conduct of a person acting in an official capacity within WES
- **Complainant:** The person making the complaint
- **Subject:** The person who is the focus of the complaint
- **Disciplinary Threshold:** The point at which a complaint may trigger the formal Disciplinary Procedure
- **Panel:** A group appointed by the Chair to review and decide on a formal complaint

4. Policy Statement

WES is committed to resolving complaints in a fair, respectful, and proportionate manner. Every complaint will be taken seriously, responded to promptly, and handled with care. Those who raise genuine concerns in good faith will be supported.

However, the Society will also protect its volunteers and Officers from malicious, repetitive, or bad-faith complaints. Anyone raising or responding to a complaint must treat the process confidentially and respectfully at all times.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Chairperson	Lead oversight of complaints process; appoint panels where needed; act as escalation point for complaints involving the Secretary

Secretary	Log all complaints; assess informally; prepare materials for panels; record outcomes
Panel (if convened)	Review the complaint, consider evidence, and make a recommendation or decision
Complainant	Submit complaints with sufficient clarity and relevance; participate in good faith
Subject of Complaint	Respond to any request for information and follow the process outlined

6. Policy Detail / Procedures

6.1 Submitting a Complaint

- Complaints must be submitted in writing to the **Secretary** (or to the **Chair** if the complaint involves the Secretary)
- Anonymous complaints will not normally be accepted unless safeguarding or legal risk is involved
- Complaints should include:
 - The name of the person being complained about
 - A description of the behaviour or issue
 - Any relevant context, dates, or evidence
 - The desired resolution (if applicable)

6.2 Informal Resolution

- Where possible, complaints will first be assessed informally by the Secretary and/or Chair to determine if:
 - The issue can be resolved through explanation, apology, or informal mediation
 - The matter needs to be escalated for formal review

6.3 Formal Complaint Review

- If informal resolution is not possible or appropriate, a formal process is triggered
- The Chair will appoint a **panel of 2–3 impartial individuals** (e.g. Officers not involved in the issue)
- The panel will review the written complaint and may request further evidence or a written response from the subject
- A decision will be reached based on the balance of information and the standards expected of the role involved
- Outcomes may include:
 - No further action

- Informal advice or expectations set
- Referral to the Disciplinary Procedure
- Temporary suspension from a WES role
- Recommendation for removal from post

6.4 Right to Respond

- The subject of the complaint will be informed in writing and given a fair opportunity to respond before a decision is made
- Complaints will not be discussed publicly or shared outside those directly involved

6.5 Record-keeping

- All complaints and outcomes will be logged by the Secretary
- Records will be retained in the Confidential Records Drive and are not disclosed outside of those with a governance need to know

7. Related Policies and References

This procedure interfaces with:

- **Disciplinary Procedure** – if the complaint relates to serious misconduct, repeated behaviour, or breaches of formal policies
- **Code of Conduct** – where expectations for behaviour are defined
- **Safeguarding Policy** – if the complaint involves the safety or wellbeing of a child or vulnerable person

The Chair and Secretary will determine if a complaint should be redirected under another procedure.

8. Compliance and Breach Handling

Failure to engage with a complaint process — including refusal to provide information, attempts to influence others, or breach of confidentiality — may itself result in disciplinary action.

Council members who receive complaints directly are expected to refer them promptly to the Secretary or Chair and **must not attempt to handle them informally on their own.**

9. Review and Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Changes Made
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0.1	18/07/2025	DG	Initial policy draft
0.5	08/10/2025	DG	Changes following chairmans review
1.0	04/11/2025	DG	Published

10. Approval Record

Approved By	Date	Notes
Full Council	04/11/2025	Approved for immediate use