



creating inclusive environments in education
and employment for people with disabilities

AHEAD Complaints Policy

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Scope	3
3. Informal Resolution	3
4. Making a Formal Complaint	3
Details of your Complaint	4
5. Responding to a Formal Complaint	4
5.1 – Local Resolution	4
5.2 – Referral to Senior Leadership Team.....	5
5.3 – Outcome.....	5
5.4 – Appeal to AHEAD’s Board of Directors.....	5
6. Confidentiality & Data Collection	6
6.1 – Right to Reply	6
6.2 – Data Retention	6

1. Introduction

AHEAD are committed to dealing effectively with any complaints you may have about our services. This policy sets out the mechanism for those whom we engage with on how to complain and to ensure that all complaints are considered and responded to promptly, fairly and sensitively. AHEAD aims to use the information garnered from complaints to learn, adapt and improve our services.

2. Scope

This Policy is for use by any member of the public who uses, has used or has sought to use AHEAD services.

AHEAD can only investigate complaints that are directly related to AHEAD staff and services within AHEAD, e.g., AHEAD's Information Line, WAM placements, UDL Badge, AHEAD Conference, GetAHEAD events, etc.

Complaints regarding external stakeholders that AHEAD engages with will be directed to their respective complaints' procedures. AHEAD may liaise with external stakeholders to support resolution of the complaint.

Complaints should be raised as soon as possible after the incident has occurred. It is recommended that complaints are made within 14 working days of the incident(s) occurring, however all complaints will be considered under this Policy.

3. Informal Resolution

AHEAD believes it is best to deal with things as soon as possible and in the easiest and most direct way, if possible. If you have a complaint, you should first try to raise it with the person you are dealing with. They will try to resolve it for you; however, they may need time to look into it, which typically may take up to five working days, or longer where a resolution is complex.

If there are any lessons to learn from addressing your informal complaint, staff will draw them to the attention of AHEAD's Senior Leadership Team.

If the AHEAD staff member you are liaising with cannot help in resolving your complaint informally, they will explain why and you may then request a formal investigation of your complaint following the procedures below, if you wish.

4. Making a Formal Complaint

You can make a complaint in any of the following ways:

1. **Written Complaint Form:** You can ask for a copy of our complaint form from the person with whom you are already in contact with or download a copy from our website.
 - a. The completed form should then be emailed to ahead@ahead.ie.
 - b. You can also post the form to AHEAD, East Hall, UCD Michael Smurfit Business School, Carysfort Ave, Blackrock, Co.Dublin. However, please be mindful that post collections are ad-hoc and resolution of your complaint may be delayed using this method.
2. **Telephone or Online:** Alternatively, AHEAD can organise a call with you, either over the phone or online, to fill in the complaint form. To arrange this, you should email ahead@ahead.ie.

If you require any additional supports in completing the complaint process due to a disability, for example, you require Irish Sign Language interpretation, please let us know by emailing ahead@ahead.ie and we will do our best to assist you.

Details of your Complaint

In order for us to deal effectively with your complaint, you should include:

- Your name, email and telephone number
- A description of what your complaint is about
- The dates and times the issue occurred and the names of the AHEAD employees or contractors involved if relevant
- Your specific concerns, starting with the most important concern
- Your desired outcome from the process (e.g. apology, explanation etc.)
- Any additional information that is relevant
- Your preferred method of communication

If information from your complaints form is missing, we may come back to you to seek the required information.

5. Responding to a Formal Complaint

AHEAD will acknowledge receipt of your formal complaint within five working days.

5.1 – Local Resolution

If your complaint is straightforward and satisfies the scope as outlined in Section 2, we will usually ask a relevant AHEAD staff member to look into the complaint. The person looking at your complaint will usually need to see the files associated with your complaint or discuss with AHEAD employees or contractors to resolve the complaint. They may also need to review relevant policies and procedures that may be related to the issue.

We will aim to resolve concerns as quickly as possible and expect to deal with the vast majority within 30 working days and you will be advised that you have the right to have your complaint referred to the Senior Leadership Team if you are not satisfied with the local resolution offered.

If your complaint is more complex, we will:

- refer your complaint to the Senior Leadership Team
- let you know within this time why we think it may take longer to investigate
- tell you how long we expect it to take
- give you regular updates every 15 working days on any progress made

5.2 – Referral to Senior Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team will consider a complaint and liaise with the relevant AHEAD staff members on the nature of the complaint in addition to reviewing correspondence, files, documentation or policies and procedures that may relate to your complaint.

The Senior Leadership Team may decide to close the complaint and communicate reason for doing so or request a meeting with you to discuss your complaint in further detail.

At this meeting, you have the right to bring an independent person to this meeting and minutes of the meeting will be taken and kept securely. If resolution can be made by issuing an apology, and this is agreeable to both parties, it will be done so at this meeting and followed up in writing within 5 working days.

Should further assessment be required, we will:

- give you regular updates every 15 working days on any progress made
- provide you with a reasonable timeframe for the conclusion of the assessment

Where the Senior Leadership Team in AHEAD deem the nature of the complaint to be very serious, AHEAD's Board of Directors will be notified.

5.3 – The Outcome

If we carry out an investigation of your complaint, we will let you know what we have found in keeping with your preferred form of communication.

Sometimes, it may be necessary for us to produce a report, explaining how and why we came to our conclusions. If we find that AHEAD was at fault regarding the issue at hand, we will explain this to you and explain why it happened.

If we find there is a fault in our systems or processes which led to this complaint, we will inform you of this and explain how we plan to prevent similar issues occurring again in the future.

5.4 – Appeal to AHEAD's Board of Directors

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the decision by the Senior Leadership Team you wish to appeal, you must inform AHEAD within 30 days of receiving the outcome.

The CEO of AHEAD will then notify the Board of Directors and raise the matter at the next Board of Directors' meeting. The outcome will be communicated with you at the earliest opportunity.

6. Confidentiality & Data Collection

All complaints will be treated as confidential and information shared will only be passed to others on a 'need to know' basis. We will make sure that your interactions with us, either ongoing or in the future, are not adversely affected as a result of your complaint.

6.1 – Right to Reply

AHEAD staff members or contractors who are the subject of the complaint will not be responsible for investigating your complaint, however, they will be informed that a complaint has been made against them, will be asked to comply with information gathering requests, and informed of their formal right of reply. Their formal response will be noted and included with the record of the complaint.

6.2 – Data Retention

AHEAD will retain correspondence relating to a formal complaint in a secure location after the resolution of the complaint. AHEAD will also record and retain general information, without any identifying information, the category or nature of the complaint, action taken to resolve the complaint, the outcome of the complaint and whether the complainant was satisfied with the outcome.

Records will be kept in line with AHEAD's Data Protection Policy.