

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS AGAINST LASER (ACCESS TO HE)

Introduction

1. This document sets out LASER's procedures for considering complaints against and appeals in relation to LASER as an Access Validating Agency. It can thus be used by customers complaining about the level of service or conduct of LASER employed staff etc.

For student appeals against assessment related and other issues related to the delivery of an Access to HE Diploma course at a LASER recognised Access to HE centre please see the 'Access to HE Student Appeals' process which can be downloaded from our student area on the website.

2. These procedures specifically cover:

Complaints against LASER's AVA decisions

- Complaints about the conduct of LASER's AVA business and staff (to include LASER's internal service functions and/or communication.)

Appeals against LASER's AVA decisions

- Appeals against decisions relating to centre approval or programme approval/validation;
- Appeals against the outcomes of moderation

Complaints

3. Complainants are advised to raise and discuss any concerns with LASER's Access Quality Manager informally in the first instance, in order to ascertain whether the matter can be resolved without adopting formal procedures. If the matter cannot be resolved the following procedures will be followed.
4. Complaints should normally be made in writing to the Access Quality Manager and all complaints should be clearly identified as a formal complaint. Complaints should be received within 30 working days of the action or notification of action which is the subject of the complaint.
5. Any complaints concerning the action of the Access Quality Manager should be made to the LASER Chief Executive Officer and be received within 10 working days of the action or notification of action which is the subject of the complaint.
6. All complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days.
7. The Access Quality Manager will conduct an assessment and review of the complaint. Should the complaint not fall within the scope of LASER complaints described in Paragraph 2 above, the complainant will be notified within 10 working days of initial receipt.
8. In the event that the complaint is being made against the Chief Executive Officer, the assessment and review will be undertaken by the Chair or Deputy Chair of LASER. Should

the complaint be against the Chair of LASER, the appeal will be presented to the Deputy Chair of LASER.

9. The Access Quality Manager, or other investigating officer, will seek all relevant documentation and evidence within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint. When the investigating officer is satisfied that all relevant evidence is present, the evidence will be assessed and an initial conclusion reached. The investigating officer will write to the complainant providing a judgement on each point in the complaint, referenced with relevant evidence. The initial report will be issued within 25 days of receipt of the complaint. The complainant will be asked to comment on factual accuracy within 10 working days.
10. The investigating officer will consider any additional information provided, before reaching a final conclusion which will be reported to the complainant within 10 working days.
11. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the conclusion s/he may refer the complaint to the Chief Executive Officer within 10 days of receipt of the report. Chief Executive Officer will respond within 15 working days.
12. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the Chief Executive Officer's conclusion s/he may refer the complaint to the Chair of LASER within 10 days of receipt of the report. The Chair of LASER will respond within 15 working days. The decision of the Chair is final. (In the event that the complaint is about the actions of the Chair, this section is amended to read Deputy Chair).

Appeals

All appeals will in the first instance be the concern the Director for Access to HE and then referred to the Access Quality & Development Committee.

13. For approved centres appellants are advised to raise and discuss any concerns with the Access Quality Manager informally in the first instance, in order to ascertain whether the matter can be resolved without adopting formal procedures. If the matter cannot be resolved the following procedure will be followed.
14. All appeals must be made in writing to the Laser Learning Awards, Access to HE Office¹ as soon as possible after the issue/event/action giving rise to the appeal has occurred. The appeal should include the basis and grounds for the appeal and provide evidence to support the appeal. Please ensure that the issues being appealed against are clearly identified as separate points.
15. All appeals will be acknowledged by LASER within 5 working days.
16. The Access Quality Manager (or a LASER officer authorised by the CEO) will conduct an initial review of the appeal and the supporting evidence. Should the appeal not fall within the scope of LASER's process as described in Paragraph 3 above, the appellant will be notified within 10 working days of initial receipt.
17. If the appeal is deemed to fall within the scope of this appeals policy the Access Quality Manager (or a LASER officer authorised by the CEO) will conduct an investigation.

¹ E: accessenquiries@laser-awards.org.uk ; T: 01227 811827; P: Laser Learning Awards, Access to HE Office, Canterbury Innovation Centre, University Road, Canterbury, CT2 7FG

18. The Access Quality Manager, or other investigating officer, will seek all relevant documentation and evidence within 15 working days of receipt of the appeal. When the investigating officer is satisfied that all relevant evidence is present, the evidence will be assessed and an initial conclusion reached. The investigating officer will write to the appellant providing a judgement on each point in the appeal, referenced with relevant evidence.
19. If the appellant is dissatisfied with the conclusion s/he may make a further appeal against the outcome to the Access to HE Quality & Development Committee (AQDC). The AQDC will convene an Appeals Panel which will comprise:
 - A member of the AQDC who has not been involved in the decision or circumstances leading to the appeal
 - The Access Quality Manager (or a delegated member of the AVA staff)
 - Up to two other individuals (who may be members of LASER staff and/or external members) who have not been involved in the decision or circumstances leading to the appeal but who would have the necessary knowledge and experience to conduct an appeal process.
20. The Appeals Panel will deliberate as soon as is practically possible but within 20 working days and will:
 - Consider evidence from the appellant and clarify evidence if necessary.
 - Consider evidence from LASER officers and clarify evidence if necessary

The Appeals Panel will reach one of the following conclusions:

- That the appeal is upheld
- That the appeal is denied

A response to the appellant will be confirmed in writing within 3 working days.

The Appeals Panel decision will be final.

16. The Appeals Panel will provide a report on its conclusions. The report will include conclusions, referenced by evidence on each point in the appeal, together with an overall conclusion and outcome.