

# **Richmond Legal Advice Service**

## **Complaints procedure**

This document outlines the Richmond Legal Advice Service's (RLAS) complaints procedure. This complaints procedure sets out how to take up matters if you think the service you have received from RLAS is unsatisfactory.

### **Display of statement**

We will display the following statement in our information leaflets (which are available when RLAS holds advice sessions and on the RLAS web site ([www.rlas.org.uk](http://www.rlas.org.uk)):

“Richmond Legal Advice Service aims to provide service of a standard acceptable to all our clients. If we fail to do this we want to know about it. This will enable us not only deal with the specific problem, but also avoid it happening again.”

### **Obtaining a copy of the complaints procedure**

Ask the volunteer adviser who sees you for a copy of this complaints procedure or take a leaflet available at RLAS' advice sessions. This procedure is also available on the RLAS web site or by contacting the secretary of RLAS on 020 8891 2105. If you would rather talk to someone about the complaints procedure please ask the volunteer adviser who sees you or contact the secretary of RLAS.

### **Availability of complaints procedure in other languages than English**

This statement is currently not available in other languages than English. When RLAS has sufficient resources the complaints procedure will be translated into relevant other languages.

### **What the complaints procedure covers**

This complaints procedure sets out what RLAS will do when it receives a complaint from a client of RLAS, an organisation or member of the public (who is not a client). It does not address complaints made by volunteers (dealt with through grievance and disciplinary procedures) nor applicants to be volunteers (recruitment procedure).

This procedure is meant to provide a means to resolve a dispute between RLAS and any complainant. It requires volunteer advisers and trustees at every stage to resolve the complaint.

### **Areas where complaints may arise**

Complaints are likely to be in one or more of the following areas:

- dissatisfaction with the service provided by RLAS, such as inadequate work, problems with casework, unacceptable delay or failure to deliver a service etc, but taking account of the limited type of advice and assistance provided by RLAS and its

limited opening times and that the RLAS is run by volunteers outside of their other activities and that RLAS has no staff (paid or unpaid);

- disputes between clients and RLAS and the organisation regarding policy, procedures or activities;
- discourtesy or unhelpfulness on the part of volunteer advisers.

### **The procedure for dealing with a complaint**

When a complaint is made, the following procedure should be adopted. Where the complaint is against a trustee of RLAS, the same procedure will be followed, but with the chairperson of the trustees involved at all stages (or another trustee nominated by the trustees).

#### Preliminary stage

The complaint should be received either via completion of a complaints form or by a request to make a verbal complaint.

#### *Stage 1*

The complainant should be invited to discuss the complaint with the secretary of RLAS, the volunteer who is complained of and a trustee of RLAS. This can be done in person or by telephone, whichever is appropriate. The secretary of RLAS will make a note of the conversation on the complaints monitoring sheet. The secretary of RLAS will endeavour to resolve the matter.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, or where it is not possible to use Stage 1 above (for example if it is not convenient for them to phone or visit the office) then refer to Stage 2 below.

Stage 1 should be completed within 10 working days of receiving the complaint.

#### *Stage 2*

The complainant should be asked to put their complaint in writing to the trustees of RLAS, marked Private and Confidential, providing as much detail of the complaint as possible.

If the complainant is not able to put their complaint in writing the complainant will be offered an interview with the trustees of RLAS or their representative. The role of the trustees of RLAS or nominee at this meeting will be confined to putting the complaints in writing, obtaining the complainant's approval for the contents of this, and asking the complainant to sign to indicate they agree with the contents. The complainant may choose to work with a third party at this stage and throughout the process - RLAS shall attempt to provide a list of potential advocates if the complainant does not have a resource they can turn to. The trustees of RLAS will then investigate the complaint and attempt to resolve it. The trustees of RLAS may delegate any aspect of the investigation to a nominee. The trustees should offer the opportunity for volunteer complained of to put forward their account, either by written statement or by presentation to the trustees.

The trustees of RLAS will ensure that all complainants receive a response in writing within 21 working days of the letter/complaint notes being received. This letter will summarise what investigation have been carried out and what action, if any, is proposed to resolve the matter. A copy of this letter should be attached to the complaints form.

If a response by letter is unsuitable, the complainant will be offered an interview with the trustees to provide the response verbally. This meeting should be held within 21 working days as before. A written record of this interview will be kept and signed by the complainant.

If the complainant is not satisfied at this stage they should ask for the matter to be dealt with under Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.

### *Stage 3*

The complainant will be notified that if they remain unhappy with the decision the complaint can be passed to Advice Now for arbitration. The arbitration will be confined to the following:

- establishing the complaints procedure has been followed.
- ensuring that the complaint has been dealt with fairly.

### **Recording and monitoring complaints**

All complaints will be recorded and kept on file, including those, which were resolved without being put in writing. The Complaints Monitoring Form (template at end of this document) shall be used to do this. All complaints shall be treated with regard to the Confidentiality policy.

The secretary will make a report once a year to the trustees of RLAS summarising the nature of complaints received and how they were resolved.

### **Publicising the procedure**

The secretary is responsible for ensuring that leaflets providing details of the work of RLAS contain references to the complaints procedure and where the detail of the procedure is set out and on the web site of RLAS.

The secretary is responsible for ensuring complaints leaflets are available at all advice sessions (or where applicable other volunteer advisers).

Each trustee and volunteer joining RLAS will be provided with a copy of the complaints procedure. The procedure will be reviewed annually and amendments should be proposed and agreed by the trustees of RLAS.

Date procedure was agreed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of review: \_\_\_\_\_

Person responsible for review: \_\_\_\_\_

# Richmond Legal Advice Service

## Complaints Form

If you wish to complaint about the service you have received from Richmond Legal Advice Service, please fill in the following and return the form to us.

Please tell us the details of your complaint:	
Please tell us what you feel should/should not have happened:	
Please tell us what you would like us to do now:	

(If you wish, you do not have to use this form.)

**Client name**

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**Address**

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**Telephone number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Client signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date signed** \_\_\_\_\_

Can Richmond Legal Advice Service contact you by telephone:    yes / no

Can Richmond Legal Advice Service contact you by email:        yes / no

**Thank you for completing this form.**

You will receive a response in 10 working days.

## Richmond Legal Advice Service

### Complaints Procedure - Record of Complaints

					Complaint Medium				
Date	Ref No.	Complainant's Name and Address	Brief details of complaint	Brief details of Resolution	By Phone	In person	By question	In writing	Lead worker