



Auntie's Cookery Academy

Complaints Policy & Procedure

1. Why this matters

At Auntie's Cookery Academy, we want everyone to feel safe, respected, and heard.

If something goes wrong — whether it's a misunderstanding, poor experience, or something more serious like bullying or discrimination — we take it seriously. This policy explains how to raise a concern, what happens next, and how we'll work to put things right.

We understand that raising a complaint isn't always easy — especially for people who process things differently, who use alternative ways to communicate, or who've had difficult experiences in the past. We'll do our best to support every individual in a way that works for them.

2. Who this applies to

This policy covers everyone connected with ACA: learners, staff, volunteers, trustees, visitors, partners, and suppliers.

Complaints can be made about anyone, including senior staff, trustees, or external professionals working with us. No one is above accountability here.

We're also aware that some individuals — including those with disabilities, long-term conditions, mental health needs or neurodivergent traits — may face additional barriers when making complaints. We're committed to removing those barriers wherever we can.

3. Our approach

We handle complaints with the following values in mind:

- **Fairness** – Every concern will be listened to and treated with respect. We'll take extra care to understand how someone's needs, background or communication style may affect their experience — and we won't make assumptions.
- **Confidentiality** – We'll keep your complaint private. However, in cases of safeguarding or legal requirements, we may need to share relevant information with appropriate authorities to ensure the safety and protection of those involved.

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- **Timeliness** – We'll respond as quickly and clearly as we can.
- **Safety** – If someone is at risk of harm, we will act.
- **No retaliation** – You'll never be penalised for speaking up in good faith.

If you need communication support (like Easy Read, a quiet space, a supporter present, or time to process things), just let us know. We'll work with you.

4. What can be complained about?

A complaint can be about any experience with ACA that causes concern or distress. This might include:

- Discrimination or unfair treatment
- Bullying or harassment
- Safeguarding or wellbeing concerns
- Unprofessional or inappropriate behaviour
- Unfair decisions or actions
- Communication issues
- Breaches of our Code of Conduct or policies

This includes experiences where someone's disability, mental health condition or neurodivergence hasn't been understood, respected, or supported — for example, being denied reasonable adjustments or experiencing exclusion.

It doesn't have to be formal or perfectly worded. If something feels wrong, you can raise it.

5. How to make a complaint

You can raise a complaint by:

- Speaking directly to someone you trust at ACA
- Emailing or writing to our chair and CEO:
Emily-Jane Dale
emily@auntieemskitchen.uk

We accept complaints in different formats — written, spoken, signed, supported by an advocate, or using alternative communication tools. If you're not sure how to raise something, just ask and we'll help.

You can raise concerns on behalf of someone else too, if they need support.

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Please include (if you can):

- What happened
- When and where
- Who was involved
- What you'd like to see happen next

If you feel unable to raise it with Emily-Jane (e.g. if the complaint involves her), you can escalate it to a trustee. Contact details will be made available on request.

6. What happens next

Here's how we handle complaints:

a. Acknowledgement

You'll receive a reply within 5 working days, confirming we've received your complaint and explaining next steps.

b. Initial Review

We'll consider whether the concern can be addressed informally (with your agreement), or whether a formal investigation is needed.

c. Investigation

If a formal investigation is required, it will be impartial, confidential, and handled by someone not directly involved. We may speak to relevant parties and review documents if needed.

We'll check whether any communication support or reasonable adjustments are needed during this process.

d. Outcome

You'll receive a written outcome within 30 calendar days (or we'll explain if more time is needed). We'll let you know:

- What was found
 - Any action we're taking
 - How to appeal if you're not satisfied
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7. Possible outcomes

If a complaint is upheld, actions might include:

- An apology or acknowledgement
- Additional support or adjustments
- Mediation or facilitated conversation
- Disciplinary action (including warnings or removal from role)
- Changes to policy or practice

We'll always aim for a resolution that is fair, proportionate, and protects everyone's wellbeing.

Where needed, we may involve specialist advice (e.g. disability rights, advocacy, trauma-informed practice) to make sure any outcomes are meaningful and inclusive.

8. Appeals

If you're unhappy with the outcome, you can appeal in writing within 10 working days of the decision. Your appeal will be reviewed by someone not previously involved, such as a senior leader or trustee.

You can request support with making an appeal if needed — including communication help, accessible formats or an advocate.

9. Record keeping

We keep a confidential log of all formal complaints and how they were resolved, for at least 2 years. This helps us learn and improve.

We anonymise this data where possible — and we review it regularly to check whether particular groups (e.g. disabled learners) are being treated fairly.

10. Final word

At ACA, we don't shy away from difficult conversations — we welcome them, because they help us grow and protect our values.

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We know that inclusion isn't just about policies. It's about how people are treated when things go wrong. So if you've had a negative experience — especially if it's linked to your access needs or identity — please tell us. You deserve to be heard.

Thank you for helping us build a community where everyone feels respected, supported, and safe.

11. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed **at least once every 12 months**, or sooner if:

- Relevant laws, regulations, or guidance change;
- A serious incident, complaint, or near miss occurs;
- Feedback from learners, staff, or partners suggests improvements; or
- Operational changes make an update necessary.

This includes review after a significant complaint, patterns of recurring complaints, or changes in regulatory guidance.

Signed: 

Printed Name: Emily-Jane Dale

Job Title: CEO and Chair

Date: 29th October 2025

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