

Complaint Handling Procedure for Animal Welfare Research Network (AWRN)

Purpose of the Procedure

- To provide a fair, transparent, and consistent method for dealing with complaints about member conduct.
- To protect the rights of all parties—complainants, respondents, and the AWRN.
- To support a positive network culture by addressing concerns constructively.

Scope

This procedure applies to:

- All members
- Any conduct related to AWRN activities, events, or representation
- Behaviour that may breach:
 - the Terms and Conditions of AWRN Membership
 - equality and diversity standards
 - relevant legislation
 - ethical or professional expectations

Stages of the Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution (Optional but Encouraged)

This should be used for minor disagreements or misunderstandings; it is not suitable for harassment, discrimination, safeguarding concerns or serious misconduct.

1. Complainant raises the issue with:
 - an event organiser or member of the Network Leadership team or Coordinating Group (officer)
2. The officer has a conversation with the complainant, and together they decide on the most appropriate action, which could be:
 - For the officer to have a private conversation with the person exhibiting unacceptable behaviour.
 - For the officer to arrange a meeting with everyone involved to talk it out.
3. Advice on making these steps work can be found here:
<https://www.acas.org.uk/handling-a-bullying-discrimination-complaint/dealing-informally>
4. If resolved, the officer records a brief, confidential note (for patterns of behaviour).
5. If unresolved or if the behaviour is inappropriate for informal handling, move to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint Submission

Wherever possible, complaints should be dealt with using an informal resolution and this process should only be used when informal resolutions do not work or in cases involving harassment, discrimination, safeguarding concerns or serious misconduct.

1. Formal Complaints must be submitted in writing by completing the AWRN Complaint Form – [link to AWRN Policies](#)
2. When completing the form, you should keep to the facts and avoid language that is insulting or abusive.
3. The complaint must include:
 - names of alleged offender(s)
 - date / time / location
 - details of AWRN event or scheme where the unacceptable behaviour took place
 - description of alleged conduct
 - any supporting evidence or witness names
4. The completed form and any supporting evidence should be emailed to either the Network Manager and Assistant Network Manager (awrn-manager@bristol.ac.uk), the Network Lead or the EDI Officer for AWRN (see important contacts on [AWRN Policies](#)).
5. Acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint will be sent within 5 working days.
6. The complaint will then be assigned to a Complaint Officer (e.g. Network Manager, Assistant Network Manager or EDI Officer) for an initial assessment

Stage 3 – Initial Assessment

The assigned Complaint Officer reads the submitted evidence to determine:

1. Whether there is a case to answer.

Questions they will consider for this include: Is this within the remit of AWRN (i.e. did it occur at an AWRN event or as part of an AWRN scheme)? Does the behaviour breach the Terms and Conditions of AWRN Membership? Does it appear to be a frivolous or vexatious claim?

2. The Complaint Officer will then decide which of these options is most appropriate:
 - There is no case to answer; the case is dismissed without action (reasons given to complainant).
 - There is a case to answer; a formal investigation (Stage 4) is recommended.
 - There is a case to answer; but due to the serious nature, it is recommended that it be referred to external specialists or the authorities.

The outcome of this will be communicated to the complainant within 10–15 working days.

Stage 4 – Formal Investigation

1. An Investigation Team is formed
 - The Investigation Team will consist of either the Network Manager or Assistant Network Manager plus 1 or 2 members of the Coordinating Group of AWRN.
 - All members of the Investigation Team must be impartial and have no prior involvement.

2. The investigation is undertaken (this should be completed within 30 days unless the complexity of the case requires further time):
 - a) Read forms and review evidence submitted.
 - b) Interview with the complainant.
 - c) Draft a written summary of the allegations and send it to the respondent.
 - d) Interview with the respondent.
 - e) Collect any additional evidence (emails, messages, witness statements).
 - f) Maintain a clear record of findings.
 - g) Meeting of the Investigation Team to decide:
 - i. Whether to dismiss the complaint or uphold the complaint fully or partially
 - ii. Recommend outcomes (see below)
 - h) The outcome is communicated to both the complainant and the respondent
3. The AWRN will keep records of the complaint, the investigation notes, decision letters and appeals documents for up to 5 years.
4. After 5 years the records will be securely destroyed, unless an individual is excluded from membership of AWRN, in which case a record of their name and reason for exclusion may be retained.

Outcomes from Formal Complaint Procedure

Outcomes and sanctions should always be proportionate to the severity of the behaviour.

Low-Level Outcomes

- Verbal or written warning

Moderate Outcomes

- Temporary removal from AWRN roles
- Temporary restriction from attending AWRN events
- Temporary restriction from engaging with AWRN schemes

Serious Outcomes

- Termination of membership
- Permanent ban from AWRN roles
- Permanent ban from AWRN events
- Referral to external authorities

Appeals Process

Members may appeal the outcomes of the formal complaint procedure on one of the following grounds:

- procedural errors
- new evidence
- manifestly unreasonable
- disproportionate outcome

Appeals must be:

- submitted within 14 days of the decision
- reviewed by an Appeals Panel not involved in the original case
- concluded within 30 days

Appeal decisions are final.

Annual Review

Each year the Coordinating Group should:

- review anonymised complaint statistics
- identify recurring issues
- consider whether they need to make changes to improve policies or culture

Reviewed and updated April 2026