

Permaculture Association Complaints, Feedback and Mediation Procedure Updated 2022

We aim to offer a fair, prompt and efficient service to our members, associates, partners and members of the public. In keeping with the permaculture ethic of People Care we will try to look after the best interests of everyone involved in the process of a formal complaint.

If you have a complaint, please let us know by following the procedures outlined below.

We will deal with your complaint in a polite and timely manner and at all stages we will keep people informed. Complaints are taken seriously and are thoroughly considered and investigated. Our complaints procedure is also a learning process and we are committed to using our findings as a means of improvement for our organisation and its membership.

We regard individual complaints processes as confidential and expect those involved to do likewise. We work within the parameters included in our complaints process and treat safeguarding as an absolute priority.

Either the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Chair of Trustees will be given details of individual complaints but other than where stipulated below, neither will have any specific involvement.

Please note that all staff work part-time and whilst we will aim wherever possible to comply with the specified time guidelines, we may not always be able to keep to them.

Complaints against:

- The Permaculture Association
- A member of staff of the Permaculture Association

The procedure

Please talk to the designated complaints officer in the first instance, who may be able to sort things out informally. If not, the complaints officer will record your concerns and the procedure set out below should be followed.

Deadline for making a formal written complaint.

Written complaints should be made in the manner requested within 3 months of the matters coming to the knowledge of the person making the complaint.

At the discretion of the complaints officer an extension of time will be allowed in exceptional circumstances.

Summary dismissal of individual complaints

In exceptional circumstances and at any stage of the complaints process if a complaint is considered to be frivolous or vexatious, gratuitously offensive or without substance, the complaints officer, CEO or Chair of Trustees has the discretion to dismiss it forthwith. We will not investigate complaints about an issue already investigated and where appeal has been exhausted, or complaints that are made to intentionally cause disruption or annoyance.

Failure on the part of any party to reasonably operate with the complaints process

If any party to a complaint fails to cooperate with the complaints process the complaints officer, CEO or Chair of Trustees has the discretion either to dismiss it forthwith or draw such conclusions as they consider appropriate.

Recording complaints

Each stage of a formal complaint will be recorded and records kept for a period of 5 years. We ask that all involved in individual complaints do likewise for the same period.

Mediation as an alternative

During stages 1 and 2 of the complaints process, and as an alternative to pursuing the complaints procedure, if all the affected parties agree, the matter can be referred to mediation to be conducted by our appointed independent mediator. The mediator will not be a member of the Permaculture Association nor play any part at all in its day to day running. The process will be confidential and completely independent of the Permaculture Association.

Stage 1 of the complaints procedure

- All correspondence relating to a formal complaint i.e., a complaint that cannot be dealt with informally, must be in writing. In the event that your complaint is lengthy, e.g. in excess of two pages of typed A4 it would assist if you also provide a short-written summary.
- At our discretion and only in instances where it is necessary, we may seek additional information from third parties or members of staff to understand the context of the complaint and to help clarify matters.
- An acknowledgement will be provided within five working days.
- At the same time a copy of the complaint will be forwarded to the person or persons referred to in it and they will be asked to provide a written response within 10 working days.
- Subject to having been provided with any responses requested a written determination of the complaint will be provided to all interested parties within a further 15 days.

Stage 2 of the complaints procedure

- If you are not satisfied with the response you receive at Stage 1, please contact us within a month of receiving the reply to your complaint. We will let you know, within five working days, that we have received your complaint and we will ask the CEO to look at it.
- If your complaint is against the CEO, two members of the board will consider it.
- You should receive a decision in writing within 21 working days.

Stage 3 of the complaints procedure

- If after stage 2 the matter has not been resolved to your satisfaction, you may appeal in writing to the Chair of the Board of Trustees, stating your full grounds of appeal. You should contact the Chair in writing within a month of receiving our Stage 2 response. We will let you know within five working days that the Chair has received your appeal.
- The appeal will be dealt with impartially by the Chair of the Board of Trustees or an alternative person (if the Chair had prior involvement). The final decision will be confirmed in writing within 21 working days, and there will be no further right of appeal.

Complaints against:

- Freelance tutor for the Diploma in Applied Permaculture Design
- LAND Centre or LAND Learning Centre

- Permaculture Design Course (PDC) teacher of a PDC course recognised by the Permaculture Association, or, a teacher delivering a Permaculture Association course on the learn.permaculture.org.uk platform

In these regards a different process should be followed. In all cases we strongly encourage the use of a mediation and learning approach. We have an appointed independent mediator that has been brought in to support the resolution of complaints and group conflicts, and is, within reason, willing to provide this support on a pro-bono (free) basis. We are able to put you in touch with them on request.

Process for Diploma tutors, LAND and LAND Learning Centres and non Permaculture Association- certified teachers

As a large networking organisation, we are unable to visit and verify the quality of each course / centre that appears on our website. Please contact the individual or centre directly and make your complaint to someone who is authorised to deal with it. They should then initiate their own procedures to look into the complaint.

The Permaculture Association will endeavour to assist wherever reasonably possible, see specific additional information below. However, we are not a regulatory body, and ultimate responsibility for resolving any related complaints lies with either the tutor or teacher involved and/ or the owners or other responsible persons of the centre. However if your complaint pertains to an issue that you feel presents real and immediate risk to the physical or emotional well-being to participants, visitors or volunteers, please contact the Permaculture Association.

Additional information regarding Diploma Tutors

Check your Apprentice-Tutor Learning Agreement (ATLA) in the first instance to ensure you are aware of the agreements you and your tutor have made together. You should have received a copy of the agreed ATLA after your Induction session. Before contacting the office, approach your tutor to raise your concerns and give them the opportunity to address the issue and, if possible, take steps to put things right. Tutors for the Diploma in Applied Permaculture Design have agreed to provide specific services within specific timeframes. You may check these in the model tutor contract provided at www.permaculture.org.uk/diploma. If you believe that these agreements are not being fulfilled and are not satisfied with the response you receive from your tutor, please notify the Diploma Coordinator at the Permaculture Association. The Coordinator will consider if any action should be taken and, with the assistance of the complaints officer, will notify accordingly.

Additional information regarding LAND and LAND Learning Centres

Complaints against a LAND/ LAND Learner Centre/ Permaculture project should be resolved by the Centre/ project itself. Therefore we advise submitting any complaints directly to the Centre in question and following the process they have established. You can submit your complaint to the centre by using the contact form of their profile on our Project and LAND map, making sure that the complaint is addressed to the named person.

However, if you believe you have a complaint that would affect the Centre's public listing on the Permaculture Association website, please contact the Association's complaints officer. The case will be reviewed by a panel and a review process for the Centre may be initiated, which may require temporary suspension from the Permaculture Association's website listing. If your complaint pertains to an issue that you feel presents real and immediate risk to the physical emotional well-being of participants, visitors or volunteers, please contact the Projects Network Development Officer at Permaculture Association.

Additional information regarding complaints about certified PDC Teachers

If you have a complaint about a certified PDC teacher you should first and foremost contact the person directly to raise your concerns. If you are unable to resolve the issue, please notify the Education Lead who will inform the Education Working Group (EWG). Two Education Working Group members will work to support the complainant and educator to reach a point of conclusion. If the issue is not resolved at this stage it will be escalated to the CEO whose decision will be final.

Teachers delivering a Permaculture Association online course or a course using the Permaculture online platform

If you have a complaint about a teacher delivering a Permaculture Association course or a course using the Permaculture Association online platform and you are unable to resolve the issue directly with the teacher, please notify the Education Lead to raise your concerns. They will work to resolve the issue, with the support of the complaint officer. If we are unable to resolve the issue, we will ask for assistance of the Education Working Group (EWG). Two Education Working Group members will work to support the complainant and educator to reach a point of conclusion. If the issue is not resolved at this stage, it will be escalated to the Chief Executive of PAB who will consider what, if any, action should be taken and will notify accordingly.