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Welsh Women's Aid National Quality Service Standards Complaints Policy

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info@welshwomensaid.org.uk | www.welshwomensaid.org.uk

Welsh Women's Aid is a registered charity in England and Wales, No. 1140962
and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales, No. 07483469



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1.1 Introduction

Welsh Women's Aid expects members to provide high quality services in a non-discriminatory way. Welsh Women's Aid operates a complaints process for members that have been awarded the Welsh Women's Aid Quality Mark against the Welsh Women's Aid (WWA) National Quality Service Standards (NQSS).

This complaints process is intended to be used when an organisation or individual wishes to complain about the action, conduct or quality of service of an organisation carrying the Welsh Women's Aid NQSS and IAQF quality marks.

1.2 WWA National Quality Service Standards

An organisation that carries the Welsh Women's Aid's Quality Mark has been independently assessed against the WWA National Quality Service Standards and found by formal NQSS Panel to have met the National Quality Service Standards in full. Where there is evidence of a breach of any of the National Quality Service Standards Welsh Women's Aid reserves the right to withdraw the NQSS and IAQF quality marks.

We take all complaints regarding our members seriously and ensure that they are promptly responded to and investigated at an appropriate level. We are committed to take action to reduce the likelihood of a recurrence of similar problems.

If an organisation with the Welsh Women's Aid Quality Mark refuses to co-operate with this complaints policy, Welsh Women's Aid reserves the right to withdraw the Quality Mark from the organisation with immediate effect. Welsh Women's Aid also reserves the right to suspend its Quality Mark from an organisation, pending an investigation, where a complaint is of an especially serious nature and there are reasonable grounds to consider the complaint has merit.

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1.3 Welsh Government's Information and Advice Quality Framework

The Information and Advice Quality Framework (IAQF Wales) is a framework of standards developed by the Welsh Government to provide a consistent approach to ensuring quality information and advice for the people of Wales.

In 2022, having aligned the National Quality Service Standards and associated assessment process to become compliant with IAQF, Welsh Women's Aid was granted IAQF Wales Approved Accrediting Body status. Consequently, specialist domestic abuse services who apply for and are successfully awarded the Welsh Women's Aid National Quality Service Standards Quality Mark will have demonstrated they also meet the criteria to be simultaneously awarded the IAQF Quality Mark. As of this time, the WWA NQSS and the IAQF cannot be awarded or withdrawn in isolation from each other.

1.4 Complaints Procedure

1. In most circumstances a complainant should follow the internal complaints procedure of the organisation being complained about first, if the matter of concern is covered by that procedure.
2. If the complainant wishes to tell Welsh Women's Aid, they are using an organisation's complaints process, they are welcome to do so. Welsh Women's Aid will inform the organisation that they are aware that a complaint is in progress.
3. If the complainant is not satisfied with the process or outcome of the organisation's investigation, they may complain to the Welsh Women's Aid NQSS Panel once the internal complaints process has been completed.
4. Any complaint following an internal complaints process should be made to the Welsh Women's Aid NQSS Panel as soon as possible after receiving the outcome of the organisation's internal complaints process and, in any event, within three months of the outcome of that process.

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5. Anyone who feels that an organisation carrying the Welsh Women's Aid NQSS and IAQF quality marks:
 - I. has not dealt with their complaint adequately, or
 - II. has breached an element of the National Quality Service Standards not covered by the organisation's internal complaints process, should contact the Chair of the Welsh Women's Aid's NQSS Panel in writing (contact details below), via email or post, outlining:
 - a. the nature of their complaint and the element(s) of the National Quality Service Standards that are alleged to have been breached.
 - b. the attempts that have been made to use the organisation's internal complaints process and the response from the member organisation.
 - c. the organisation's Complaints Policy and Procedures, if available.
6. Upon receipt of a written complaint regarding an accredited organisation, the Chair of the NQSS Panel, who is also a member of the senior management team in Welsh Women's Aid, will:
 - I. acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within three weeks, outlining Welsh Women's Aid's powers and limitations regarding the matter and the process that will be followed.
 - II. If the member of the Panel decides that the appeal or complaint does not fall within the scope of this procedure, she will write to the complainant explaining why the appeal or complaint cannot be acted upon.
 - III. If the member of the Panel determines that the matter falls within the scope of this procedure, she will:

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- a. contact the organisation concerned within three weeks of receiving the complaint to inform them of the complaint made against them.
 - b. inform the organisation of whether Welsh Women's Aid intend to suspend their Quality Mark pending an investigation, within three weeks.
 - c. request information regarding any internal complaints process followed, if relevant. Welsh Women's Aid expects to receive this information within three weeks of the request being made.
7. The member of the Panel shall convene an NQSS Panel, chaired by WWA's CEO, to consider the complaint and any need to suspend an organisations quality marks pending an investigation. The decision to suspend the NQSS and IAQF quality marks will be based upon:
- I. Any safety and safeguarding concerns raised.
 - II. The nature and severity of the complaint and potential breach of the Quality Standards.
 - III. Impact on the organisation and service users.
 - IV. Impact on the complainant.
 - V. Conviction of any offences for example data protection legislation.
 - VI. Refusal to cooperate with the investigation, or obstruction of the investigation process.
 - VII. Refusal to provide or withdrawn from delivery of the services for which it is accredited.

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8. The organisation against which the complaint is raised has the right to appeal against the suspension of the quality marks within a 3-week period after notification using the appeals process outlined below.
9. The Chair of the NQSS Panel will appoint an investigator (who is not a member of the panel) to investigate the complaint. The investigation will include:
 - I. contacting the complainant to clarify the complaint and gather evidence of the alleged breach of the National Quality Service Standards;
 - II. contacting the organisation to gather responses and information about the alleged breach of the National Quality Service Standards.
10. During the investigation the investigator and Welsh Women's Aid will consider any safety or safeguarding issues that may arise, take appropriate action and endeavour to minimise any potential risks.
11. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend, representative or other supporter in all interactions with the investigator.
12. The investigator will report to the NQSS Panel (which will exclude the member of panel responsible for initially investigating the complaint). The Panel members will make a decision about whether the complaint is upheld.
 - I. If it is determined that the complaint is not upheld, the panel shall dismiss the complaint but may make general recommendations or remarks to the member.
 - II. If the complaint is upheld, the panel will consider what sanction to impose. This could include:
 - i. Permanent removal of the quality marks within seven days.
 - ii. Temporary (time-bound) removal of the quality marks subject to the

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recommended actions being taken by the organisation within three months.

13. When determining the outcome of the complaint, the panel will consider the findings of the investigation including:

- I. Safety and safeguarding concerns raised.
- II. The nature and severity of the complaint and potential breach of the Quality Standards.
- III. Impact on the organisation and service users.
- IV. Impact on the complainant.
- V. Conviction of any offences, for example data protection legislation.
- VI. Refusal to cooperate with the investigation, or obstruction of the investigation process.
- VII. Refusal to provide or withdrawn from delivery of the services for which it is accredited.
- VIII. Refusal, or failure to comply with any of the processes or procedures of the NQSS e.g., a mid-point review, notification of significant changes within the organisation.

14. The complainant and the member organisation will be notified in writing of the outcome of the investigation.

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1.5 Appeals

1. If any party is dissatisfied with the decision to suspend pending investigation; or the outcome of the investigation, they can appeal to the Welsh Women's Aid Chair of Trustees within 1 calendar month of the decision.
2. After consideration of an appeal, the decision of the Welsh Women's Aid Chair of Trustees will be final; there will not be any further recourse to appeal within Welsh Women's Aid.
3. Welsh Women's Aid will maintain a confidential record of all complaints and the outcomes of any investigations and appeals. This will include the complainant's name, role, date received, nature and substance of the complaint, when it was responded to, the investigation, the outcomes and the complainant response if provided.

1.6 Concerns raised directly by WWA Staff

1. From time-to-time WWA staff may become aware of conduct, actions or service delivery that breach the National Quality Service Standards by having direct contact with a member service or by supporting service users who are accessing or trying to access a member service through the National Live Fear Free Helpline.
2. In the first instance WWA staff will discuss their concerns with a member of the organisations management team. If the WWA member of staff is not satisfied with the response received, they will then escalate their concern to a member of the WWA Senior Management Team who will then discuss the concern with the CEO or a senior manager of the organisation.
3. If the incident raises significant concerns about the quality of service the member organisation provides or should there be a pattern of repeated concerns recorded by WWA, WWA reserve the right to undertake a full investigation into the alleged misconduct following the above process, points 7-17, which could result in the

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member service having their Quality Mark withdrawn.

4. Welsh Women's Aid also reserves the right to suspend the NQSS and IAQF from an organisation, pending an investigation, where a complaint is of an especially serious nature and there are reasonable grounds to consider the complaint has merit.

1.7 Re-application for the National Quality Service Standard

If an organisation re-applies for the National Quality Service Standards after a previous withdrawal of the Quality Mark following a complaint, a full assessment will be undertaken, and in addition the panel will require:

- I. A written explanation of the learning from the complaint and steps taken to address the issues arising.
- II. An extended interview with the Chair of your Board during the assessment visit to discuss the complaint.

1.8 Contact

If you would like further information about this complaints' procedure, please contact the NQSS team at membership@welshwomensaid.org.uk.

If you wish to make a complaint about an organisation carrying the Welsh Women's Aid Quality Mark, please write to:

The NQSS Panel,
Welsh Women's Aid,
Pendragon House,
Caxton Place,
Pentwyn,
Cardiff.

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