

SEEDA's Complaints Procedure

Complaints and Comments Policy

The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) is always interested in the views of businesses and members of the public about our initiatives and how we develop and manage them. We shall listen carefully to any views that are put forward and if problems are identified we shall take remedial action if at all possible.

What is a complaint?

A complaint for the purposes of this policy is one that relates to:

Any expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided by an SEEDA staff member or person or body acting on behalf of the Agency, and can be verbal or written.

It does not include:

- Dissatisfaction with general Government
- Third party dissatisfaction with a person or organisation applying for SEEDA funding or contract
- Dissatisfaction about Board Members - the Agency has a separate Code of Conduct for Board Members
- Complaints that are currently the subject of legal proceedings

Anyone can make a complaint about:

- The quality of service
- Unfair treatment
- Unreasonable delay in receiving information
- Being given the wrong information

Complaints can be made in a number of ways:

- By email
- By phone
- In writing

You may wish to try to resolve the matter immediately by telephone. Please contact the person you have been dealing with at SEEDA. They will try and sort out your enquiry promptly, and do their best to put things right.

If you have a comment or complaint about our telephone/reception service because you feel that a member of staff has been unhelpful or discourteous, you can ask to speak to the Facilities Manager. The Facilities Manager will listen to what you have to say and take any appropriate action, as necessary.

SEEDA's Service Commitment

We are committed to providing high standards of service to everyone we deal with. Complaints as well as feedback and suggestions for improvement are welcomed as they help us to review our service performance and identify where it can be improved.

We aim to provide a complaints service that is:

- easy to use
- keeps you informed about the progress of your complaint
- lets you know the outcome of your complaint and the reasons for it
- deals with complaints as quickly and effectively as possible
- helps us learn from complaints to improve our practice

We will monitor and analyse complaints as part of our review of service performance and will regularly review the effectiveness of our complaints procedure to ensure that it remains relevant, credible and robust in its operation.

We also need to listen when people say things are going well or make suggestions about the way we deliver services. Monitoring this information will highlight any problem areas as well as showing areas of good practice.

Persistent and/or vexatious complaints are becoming an increasing problem for public sector bodies and difficulties in handling such complaints can place strain on time and resources and can be stressful for staff who have to deal with these complex and challenging issues. In order to counter this, SEEDA has introduced a policy that deals with persistent or vexatious complaints.

Complaints about Partnerships

If the complaint is about a Partnership (e.g. Thames Valley Economic Partnership) you should contact the Partnership Secretariat in the first instance. They should deal with the complaint in accordance with their complaints procedure. If you are still not satisfied with the outcome you should contact the Accountable Body, which is usually the Local Authority for the area in which the Partnership is situated. SEEDA will only get involved as a last resort, where a very serious complaint/allegation has been made; or where you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint to the accountable body. SEEDA's role will be to mediate between the parties to resolve the complaint.

How to make a complaint?

Stage 1 – Informal

In the first instance, complaints about our services should be dealt with by the SEEDA member of staff who had been dealing with you. Most complaints can be resolved at this early stage.

Complaints can be received via telephone, fax, post, or e-mail.

Our policy is that we aim to acknowledge complaints **within 3 - 5 working days** and we will aim to resolve the complaint **within 10 working days** from

the date of receiving a Stage 1 complaint.

If you remain dissatisfied at the end of the first stage, you can write to the contact person given in the letter you receive. You will have **10 working days** in which to do this, outlining why you are dissatisfied and what outcome you would like to have.

Stage 2 – Formal

If it is not appropriate to contact the staff member direct as referred to in stage 1, or if you are not satisfied with the stage 1 response, you may ask for your request to be reviewed. This will initially be an internal review carried out by officers of SEEDA. A request for a review should be addressed to Susan Priest, Executive Director: Business Development, email: susanpriest@seeda.co.uk.

Susan Priest
Executive Director: Business Development
SEEDA
Cross Lanes
Guildford
GU1 1YA

We aim to acknowledge complaints within **3 - 5 working days**. We will provide a full response within **20 working days** of receipt unless further investigation is required, in which case we will advise you of the reasons for a delay and provide an alternative timescale for a full response.

Stage 3 – Appeal

If you have a reason to believe that the response provided by in Stage 2 does not satisfactorily resolve your complaint, you can contact the Chief Executive Officer of SEEDA, Oona Muirhead, email: oonamuirhead@seeda.co.uk.

Oona Muirhead
Chief Executive Officer
SEEDA
Cross Lanes
Guildford
GU1 1YA

The Chief Executive Officer will aim to acknowledge complaints within **3 - 5 working days**. We will provide a full response within **20 working days** of receipt unless further investigation is required, in which case we will advise you of the reasons for a delay and provide an alternative timescale for a full response.

Procedure for Dealing with Vexatious or Persistent Complaints

SEEDA has introduced Information guidelines to allow staff to be able to make an informed decision on how to assess whether complaints are vexatious or persistent based on the application of relevant criteria.

A vexatious complaint falls into the category of a complaint that has been thoroughly investigated and in such cases the complainant will have received a full and detailed response, but not withstanding that, will remain dissatisfied despite lengthy correspondence and contact from staff within the Agency.

The vexatious or persistent complaint may be referred to the relevant Executive Director, who will then decide how best to deal with the issue.

Where can I get help if I am still not satisfied?

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of our Stage 3 review, you should put your concerns in writing to the appropriate independent public body.

If your complaint concerns handling of a Freedom of Information request you should contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for an independent assessment and decision on the handling of your request. The ICO is an independent statutory body which oversees the operation of the FoI Act and Environmental Information Regulation. Details are available at the Information Commissioner's Office website:

<http://www.informationcommissioners.gov.uk>.

If your complaint concerns any other area of SEEDA's service, you are entitled to appeal to the Parliamentary Ombudsman through your Member of Parliament to investigate whether you have suffered injustice caused by maladministration. The Ombudsman's office carries out independent investigations into complaints about UK government departments and their agencies. Details are available at the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website: <http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/>

Your personal information

If you use our complaints procedure, you are agreeing that we can use any personal information you send us for purposes connected with your complaint. We may also disclose your personal information to other individuals and organisations if we are legally required or permitted to do so under the Data Protection Act 1998 or the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Equal opportunities monitoring

We may use complaints about discrimination to review our policies and procedures to ensure that we offer equality of opportunity and treatment to people of different racial or ethnic origins.

We will monitor the ethnicity of complaints to enable us to ensure that we promote and maintain this commitment. All information will be treated as confidential.

Comments and suggestions

We welcome comments and suggestions as these can help us improve our services. Please send any comments or suggestions via our online form at: http://www.seeda.co.uk/Contact_Us/Contact_form/.