**Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors- complaints procedure.**

**1. Aims of the APBC**

1.1 The aims of the APBC are set out in the association’s constitution and can be found on the website at <http://www.apbc.org.uk/apbc/about>

**2. Aims of APBC complaints procedure**

2.1 To ensure that all complaints are handled and investigated in a professional manner.

2.2. To treat all complainants and APBC members fairly within the principles of the APBC constitution, the APBC code of practice and the general law.

2.3 To seek resolution between the complainant and the APBC member.

2.4 To seriously investigate all complaints.

2.5 To apply the complaints procedure to all Student, Provisional and Full Members

**3. What constitutes a valid complaint?**

3.1 Any material breach of either the constitution or code of practice of the APBC

Examples of complaints:

1. Misleading or unscientific information on members’ marketing materials.
2. Failing to maintain adequate insurance.
3. Causing avoidable harm, contrary to the welfare interests of an animal.

Examples of issues which will not be considered complaints.

1. Failure to satisfactorily resolve a client’s problem insofar as reasonable.
2. Failure to keep an appointment.
3. Pointing out the failings or mistakes of others working within the field of animal behaviour and training to clients or veterinary personnel. Others may include non-APBC members or those who are working within or out with the regulatory body of the ABTC.

Where issues are raised by either a client, others working within the industry of animal behaviour and training, or veterinary personnel members these would not be subject to the full complaints procedure, and it would be expected that the matter could be resolved informally.

**4. Who may make a complaint?**

4.1 Anyone may make a complaint, including members of the public, other members, veterinary professionals, other organisations. This list is not exhaustive.

**5. The complaints procedure**.

5.1 All complaints must be made in writing and submitted by either e-mail or post to the APBC office. The complainant will give their full name, contact telephone number, e-mail address (if available) and postal address. Full contact details will be requested if not initially provided. Failure to provide satisfactory information will render the complaint null and void.

Anonymous complaints will be disregarded.

5.2 The complaint will be logged at the administrative office. Membership status of the individual will be checked and if found not to be a member the complainant will be informed that no action can be taken by the APBC.

5.3 The letter of complaint and contact details of the member will be passed to the designated complaints member (CM).

5.4 CM will contact the complainant by telephone, e-mail or letter to ascertain the exact terms of the complaint. The precise details of the complaint will be ascertained and documented by CM and submitted to the complainant for agreement.

5.5 If the complainant advises of independent parties who may be able to support the complaint, the validity of this will be checked by the CM.

5.6 If the complainant supplies names and contact details (telephone number, e-mail address and postal address) of those independent parties referred to above then they will be contacted in writing by the CM. Failure to provide contact details will mean no contact will be made.

5.5 CM will contact the member in writing (e-mail, postal) and explain the terms of the complaint, including the name of the complainant and witnesses if appropriate. CM will forward copies of all relevant documentation to the member by either e-mail or recorded delivery. The member will not be asked to respond until in possession of this.

5.6 The member will be asked to submit a written response to the allegations within 14 days of receipt. Extensions to this may be granted at the discretion of the CM.

5.7 CM will consider the member’s written response and, if deemed reasonable, no further action will be necessary and both parties will be informed in writing.

5.8 In the eventuality that CM does not consider that the member’s written response is reasonable then the member will be informed in writing.

Negotiation with the complainant and member may be appropriate to reach a satisfactory resolution of the complaint.

5.9 If resolution is not reached by both parties, or the alleged offence is considered to be so grave, then the complainant and member will be asked to attend a specially chaired meeting of the APBC.

This meeting should take place at a convenient location for both parties, at a time and date that is suitable. The member will be given 28 days written notice to attend a meeting of the Committee and written details of the complaint made against them.

The complaints panel will consist of the CM and any other members of the APBC complaints committee as agreed upon by the Committee. The member and complainant will be allowed the opportunity to be accompanied by another. In addition, the member and complainant will be given the opportunity to present their case or ask another (e.g. solicitor) to do so for them.

It shall be for the complaints panel to determine the nature of the meeting and whether cross examination is appropriate. If either the member or complainant declines or refuses to attend such a meeting, it may proceed in their absence.

Within 14 days of the meeting a decision will be made by the CM and other committee members. No member may be expelled unless at least two thirds of the committee then present votes in favour of the member’s expulsion.

The member and complainant will be informed of this decision in writing.

**6. Points to consider**

6.1 For ease the use of telephone calls may be appropriate. If this option is utilised then the member will be contacted and agreement reached for a date and time. Members will not be “cold called” and questioned.

Telephone calls between the CM and the member will last no longer than 30 minutes; if this is not sufficient time then both parties should agree another date and time.

Discussion of the actual complaint will only happen once the member has been informed in writing of the nature of the complaint and provided with copies of all documentation relating to it.

**7. Sanctions.**

7.1 Sanctions will reflect the gravity of the offence, for example they may include offering an apology to the complainant, completing CPD within a specified timeframe, or expulsion for serious or continuing failures. Failure to comply with recommendations may result in further disciplinary actions by the CM.

**8. Following complaint**

8.1 If the complaint is not upheld, then no record will be kept and it will not be used in any future proceedings. The process is entirely confidential. Only the complainant(s), the APBC member, independent parties (5.5) and the CM will have access to the relevant information relating to the complaint.

8.2 If the complaint is upheld then a record will be kept on file for five years, and knowledge of this complaint may be taken into account if other complaints of a similar nature are received in the future.

8.3 Details of an upheld complaint will not be passed on to any other organisation either formally or informally, apart from the regulator (the ABTC) if appropriate, or law enforcement agencies (if a legal requirement exists to do so).