

Caring for your customers  
in the private hearing sector  
**BSHAA Customer Care Scheme**



**Assuring High Quality Professional Hearing Care**



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## Customer Care and the Consumer Code

The British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists (BSHAA) together with businesses in the sector, operate a Customer Care Scheme which offers customers who use a business in the scheme a user-friendly complaints resolution service. Also a number of companies have signed up to the Consumer Code of the British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA).

The Code is approved by the Office of Fair Trading and members must adhere to the rules and guidelines of the nationally recognised Consumer Code. These schemes give your customers greater assurance of your commitment to providing an even higher professional service.

## The BSHAA Customer Care Scheme

- Is a user-friendly procedure for resolving complaints. It will deal responsively with any concerns a customer has about the product or service they have received from a member Company.
- Also administers the complaints resolution process for companies in the hearing care sector who have signed up to the BHTA Consumer Code.
- Should reassure customers that those companies who are registered (and their staff) are committed to dealing with customer concerns in accordance with the CCS rules and guidelines.

## Informing customers about the company complaints procedure

Participating companies will give the customer at the beginning of their relationship with them a *How to Complain* leaflet. This should ensure that the customer is fully informed about how to raise any concerns and if necessary, register any complaint about the product or service; at any stage from point of sale, through pre-contract to contract and into aftercare.

Participating companies must also have:

- A user-friendly procedure for complaints, which has no more than three levels of management dependent on the size of the Company.
- A specified reasonable time limit for responding to complaints.
- A willingness to co-operate with local consumer advisers or any other intermediary acting on behalf of a customer when making a complaint.

## The BSHAA Customer Care Scheme offers:

- A conciliation service with the objective of arriving at a decision acceptable to both parties.
- An independent redress scheme (an arbitration process paid for by the Company) to resolve customer complaints which are not resolved by conciliation – decisions from the arbitration scheme are binding on participating companies.

However, BSHAA would only allow a case to go to arbitration if all other avenues had been exhausted and it considered that the customer had a reasonable case.

# Complaints handling procedure

Participating companies undertake to:

- Inform the customer how to make a complaint; to whom within the Company a complaint should be addressed; what information the customer has to provide and the timescales that will apply in dealing with the complaint.
- Have a user-friendly procedure for dealing with a complaint, which will have an appropriate structure commensurate with the size of the Company and in any event sufficiently efficient to deal with any complaint within the timescales mentioned below.

The procedure should allow for two levels of management for medium and large companies allowing the complainant to be considered by someone other than the person with whom they originally dealt. Ownership of the complaints process must be at the top level of the organisation (delegating the administration of the process does not absolve directors or owners of the business of their responsibilities for the Customer Care Scheme).

- Acknowledge a complaint within 5 working days of receipt and aim to resolve complaints within 20 working days.

### *Complaints handling procedure (continued)*

- Ensure that all communications with the customer (verbal and written) are carried out in a courteous and professional manner.
- Ensure that staff are trained in customer care and are fully conversant with all aspects of the complaints resolution procedure.
- Ensure that a complaint is logged and a step by step log of progress on the complaint is maintained and can be made available to the conciliation or independent redress service if required. Likewise a log of all communications and copies of all correspondence and documentation relating to the complaint (and the patient journey) will be kept and made available if required.
- Give maximum co-operation with advisers or any other intermediary consulted by the customer, such as a Citizens Advice Bureau or Trading Standards Officer.

The customer will be informed by the Company that should a complaint not be resolved to the customer's satisfaction, they have the right to contact BSHAA, who will follow the procedure outlined below for conciliation and, if need be, the process for independent redress (arbitration).

Application to join  
the BSHAA Customer  
Care Scheme





Application to join

the BSHAA Customer Care Scheme

Please complete all fields

<b>Business Name:</b>		
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#### Contact Details

<b>First name:</b>		<b>Surname:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>			
<b>Town:</b>		<b>County:</b>	
<b>Postcode:</b>		<b>Phone:</b>	
<b>How many dispensers in the business:</b>		<b>Email:</b>	
<b>Are you a Member of BSHAA ?</b>			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Please List Dispensers who are BSHAA members



First Name	Surname	Membership No. if known

The business wishes to apply to join the BSHAA Customer Care Scheme. We have read the rules and guidelines as described in this booklet and agree to adhere to these and to give full co-operation to BSHAA as and when requested in order to resolve any customer complaint. We also agree to commit to the responsibilities described in this booklet.

Signature ..... Name ..... Date .....

Send: email to: [chiefexecutive@bshaa.com](mailto:chiefexecutive@bshaa.com) or mail to: BSHAA, 9 Lukins Drive, Great Dunmow, Essex, CM6 1XQ  
You can also join online at [www.bshaa.com](http://www.bshaa.com) (Go to the Customer Care Pages)



## The BSHAA conciliation service

- BSHAA will provide, at no cost to the customer or the Company, a conciliation service with the aim of resolving a complaint in a manner acceptable to both parties.
- On receipt of a complaint, confirmation will be sought that in-company resolution procedures have been exhausted and if not, will refer the customer back to the Company. If they have been exhausted (or when they are) BSHAA will seek detailed information from the customer on the nature of the complaint; and will seek a report from the Company, including documentation, to be returned within 7 working days.
- The complaint will be allocated to a trained conciliator, who will seek to facilitate resolution within 20 working days from receipt of the request for conciliation.
- The Company will make available to the conciliator, within 7 working days, any further information, documentation or access to personnel, which the conciliator deems necessary to facilitate successful conciliation.
- The conciliator may access, via BSHAA, any specialist advice which they deem necessary to facilitate successful conciliation.

Conciliation is aimed at resolving the matter in a manner acceptable to both parties. It is not an investigation. However, should it be considered, after reviewing all documentation that the customer has a case against the Company then the Company will be advised accordingly.

If the Company disagrees with BSHAA in this regard then it will be incumbent upon the Company to make a valid counter-argument. If BSHAA considers the counter-argument to be invalid it will advise the Company and if the Company does not change its view BSHAA will advise the customer accordingly. Similarly if BSHAA consider that the complaint is not valid it will inform the customer accordingly.

BSHAA takes its responsibilities with regard to Fitness to Practice issues very seriously and will ensure that it fulfils these responsibilities. Should the BSHAA Chief Executive Officer receive information pointing to a potential Fitness to Practice issue, the matter will be referred back to the business for self-referral, by the business or dispenser, to the HCPC. This referral must be done within two weeks unless the business can satisfy BSHAA that there is no Fitness to Practice issue.

Should the conciliator receive information pointing to a potential breach of BSHAA Codes of Practice by a member of the Society, such information would be referred to BSHAA for investigation, which would be entirely separate from, and not affecting or delaying, conciliation.



## Independent redress

If a complaint is not resolved by conciliation, the customer may be offered access to independent redress via arbitration. This process is binding on the Company but should a customer reject the findings their only other route is probably through the courts. However the customer has the right to forego arbitration and pursue other legal avenues of redress, but at the risk that failure to take up the offer of arbitration could seriously prejudice the customer's chances of redress through the courts.

Where referral to the Independent Arbitrator is chosen, an Arbitrator will be appointed, via BSHAA, at no cost to the customer. The Company will meet the costs of arbitration.

The objective of the Arbitrator is to arrive at a conclusion that is fair and reasonable in the circumstances, looking at all the evidence presented by both parties. The Arbitrator is an individual who is completely independent of BSHAA and of the industry.

BSHAA will use the OFT-approved Independent Consumer Arbitration Service administered by IDRS Ltd. The Conciliation Officer will pass all the evidence gathered, including copies of all correspondence between the parties and BSHAA to the Independent Arbitrator within five working days.

## The business obligation to BSHAA

Businesses in the BSHAA Customer Care Scheme are under an obligation to BSHAA to adhere to the rules and timescales as set out above. Any deviation from these, without mitigating circumstances, could lead to the Company being excluded from the Customer Care Scheme.

The BSHAA Customer Care Scheme is funded by the subscription of BSHAA members and therefore it expects that sole traders who join the Customer Care Scheme will be members of the Society and that multi-dispenser companies either have, or are working towards, 100% BSHAA membership.

A CCS complaint involving a dispenser who is NOT a member of BSHAA will be dealt with under the Scheme, and the dispenser will be encouraged to join.

Should the dispenser choose not to do so, the business will agree to fund the Scheme to a level equivalent to the annual BSHAA membership fee.



