



**MEMBER
COMPLAINTS
PROCEDURE**

1. INTRODUCTION

The International Federation of Aromatherapists (IFA) is the voluntary regulator for aromatherapy operating worldwide, set up primarily to protect the public. As a Professional Body we set the standards that practitioners are required to meet continuously in order to be displayed on the register. The Code of Conduct, Ethics and Practice, detail the quality of care that you can expect from an IFA Registrant, which are binding on all practitioners on the [register](#). If a Registrant falls short of those standards, we need you to tell us in order to bring the Registrant to account for their actions and protect public confidence in the profession. All complaints will be investigated thoroughly and sanctions will be imposed on a Registrant if appropriate, in keeping with regulatory healthcare guidelines.

2. COMPLAINTS WE CAN DEAL WITH

- The care or advice received from one of our Registrants
- The physical or mental health of one of our Registrants
- A Registrant's professional conduct
- A Registrant's business practices that disadvantage or exploit clients
- A Registrant's personal behaviour that directly impacts on their fitness to practice.

The IFA will not consider complaints that are raised more than three (3) years after the incident has occurred.

Please note however, we cannot arrange refunds or compensation or provide legal advice or become involved in legal disputes even if a complaint is upheld.

3. COMPLAINTS WE CANNOT DEAL WITH

- a) Complaints regarding aromatherapy practitioners who are not current members of the IFA. To check the register [click here](#).
- b) Complaints about companies, unless they are a registered corporate member. To check the register [click here](#).
- c) Complaints made anonymously that cannot otherwise be verified, see [Whistleblowing Policy](#).
- d) Complaints that are not made formally in writing. If this is likely to be a problem for you, you will either need to ask someone to fill the [Complaints Form](#) in for you or we will assist you. For example, the Registrar will take down the details over the telephone and complete the form for you and then read the statement back to you for confirmation to ensure you are in agreement. The completed form will then be sent to you to sign.
- e) Complaints where the complainant refuses or is unable to provide the necessary evidence to justify their claims; the emphasis of supplying evidence rests on the complainant.
- f) Complaints which fall within the jurisdiction of another regulator, for example:

- i. Complaints regarding employment disputes or civil proceedings. However, the IFA reserves the right to act on the outcome of the proceedings if they relate to dishonesty.
 - ii. Complaints regarding breaches of Data Protection which must be directed to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). However, the IFA reserves the right to act on the outcome of the proceedings.
 - iii. Complaints regarding a breach of the Committee of Advertising (CAP) code of practice, which is the role of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) unless there is evidence of a breach of the Cancer Act 1939. However, the IFA reserves the right to act on the outcome of any other proceedings by the ASA.
 - iv. Complaints regarding claims for compensation – all practising members have insurance to cover claims and all Registrants will provide their insurance details upon request.
- g) Complaints on another individual's behalf - complaints should wherever possible, come directly from the person affected unless:
- i. The complainant is considered vulnerable and for example a chaperone wishes to raise concerns on their behalf
 - ii. the IFA receives written legal authorisation for someone to act on behalf of the client.
 - iii. It is a public protection issue, where the IFA will act on complaints or information received from a third-party source e.g. insurance reports, social media, another regulator etc. that suggests that one of your Registrants may have breached our Codes.
 - iv. Other third-party complaints may also be considered and will be judged on a case-by-case basis.
- h) Complaints in regard to contractual disputes between practitioners.

4. DUAL REGISTRATION

Some IFA Registrants, for professional or other reasons, may also hold dual registration with other bodies. To prevent two registers from independently acting on the same complaint please see below links to other professional bodies for you to progress enquiries or complaints with if necessary. Typically, Registrants will display the bodies they belong to on their promotional literature.

- [Association of Reflexologists \(AOR\)](#)
- [Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council \(CNHC\)](#)
- [Complementary Therapists Association \(CTHA\)](#)
- [Federation of Holistic Therapists \(FHT\)](#)
- [International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists \(IFPA\)](#)

5. MULTIPLE OR DUPLICATE COMPLAINTS

Where a complaint has already been made to another regulator or professional body, the IFA will not normally initiate its procedures until the outcome of the complaint has been finalised.

The IFA Disciplinary & Complaints Committee reserve the right to ratify the decision of another body that meets or has similar professional standards to that of the IFA and duplicate the sanction imposed by that body without any further reference to the IFA's complaints process. This decision cannot be appealed but is subject to annual review.

Where complaints are made simultaneously to the IFA and other bodies, the IFA has the right to negotiate with those bodies as to who will address the complaint to avoid duplicating complaints processes. If negotiation is not possible, the IFA will make its decision as to whether it will address the complaint first based on whether the Registrant complained against has been a Registrant of the IFA for a longer period of time than they have the other body. If so, the IFA will address the complaint first, if not, the IFA will allow or refer to the other body to hear the complaint first.

Where multiple or duplicate complaints are made against the same Registrant, they would be considered together to enable a holistic assessment of the Registrant's fitness to practise, leading to better outcomes and for greater efficiency in the complaints process.

6. WHAT TO DO FIRST

You should always try and resolve any concerns with the practitioner before reporting it to the IFA or if he/she works in a larger practice, to the practice manager, as complaints can usually be resolved at this stage. We will require to see evidence of these efforts. All Registrants will have a written complaints procedure in place which we would expect you to have exhausted. We do however recognise that in some exceptional circumstances that this may not always be appropriate.

7. RAISING A COMPLAINT

If you are unable to resolve a dispute with the Registrant or it would not be appropriate to do so then you may raise your concern with the IFA which will be investigated as outlined below. All complaints must be made in writing, written in English using the Complaints Form. If this is likely to be a problem for you, you will need to ask someone to fill the form in for you or please let us know and we will help you, but please be aware this will add additional time to resolving the complaint.

Please note: Although we understand it may be a stressful experience, please keep statements factual rather than emotional, and allocate the necessary time to complete the form in full, including all the points you wish to make.

For expediency, it would be helpful if the complainant could also draw attention to the specific codes within the Code of Conduct, Ethics and Practice, to which their complaint relates.

8. COMMUNICATION

The Operations Manager, who is also the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee Clerk will be responsible for:

- a) providing updates as progress is made;
- b) requesting further information from either party where necessary on behalf of the Case Examiners;
- c) requesting further comment on submissions; and
- d) informing the complainant and Registrant of decisions at the relevant stages.

Please note complaints will not be discussed over the telephone.

9. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Confirmation

When we have received your complaints form, we will confirm receipt within three (3) working days.

Information gathering

The Registrant will be sent a copy of the complaint made against them and asked for a response in writing. The complainant will be sent a copy of the Registrant's reply so they may comment on its contents if they wish to and asked to declare any prior relationship they have with the client or a named witness. The Registrant will also be given a copy of the complainant's comments. If a copy of the client's or the Registrant's health records is relevant to the investigation then we will ask permission to receive a copy of these. Equally, if it is identified that it might be useful to the case to obtain any other evidence that was not supplied by either the complainant or Registrant this will be requested.

Assessing the evidence

When we review a complaint, we will first assess the evidence in support of the complaint. Initially, the Case Examiners, which consist of the head of the Membership Committee and Operations Manager, will review all the information and evidence relating to the complaint and decide whether or not to refer the complaint to the disciplinary stage or deal with it informally. The Case Examiners may decide upon evidence or lack thereof to dismiss the complaint at any stage. Complaints that arise due to oral communications will not necessarily mean a complaint will be dismissed, but may impact on how we intend to assess the complaint. This step is necessary to reduce the likelihood of frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints.

Types of evidence typically include:

- Written policies
- Written correspondence
- Telephone recordings
- Witness statements
- Third party reports

The onus of responsibility for supplying evidence rests firmly with the complainant.

10. FRIVOULUS, VEXATIOUS AND MALICIOUS COMPLAINTS

Most people who make complaints behave in a reasonable manner. However, occasionally, complainants may act inappropriately or out of character when in distress or difficulty. Staff will make reasonable allowances for a complainant's behaviour and understand that it does not, in itself, indicate that the complaint is unjustified. However, it becomes vexatious when a person persists unreasonably for reasons other than to genuinely resolve a concern, or acts in a manner, which even after allowances have been

made is inappropriate and unacceptable. Vexatious complaints can be distressing for the staff member addressing the complaint as well as time consuming; diverting valuable charity resources unnecessarily. Therefore, such complaints must be properly identified and managed.

IDENTIFYING

In identifying frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints the Case Examiners must distinguish between genuine concerns and people who are simply being difficult. They must carefully consider:

- The merits of the case rather than the attitude of the complainant, as complainants may have other reasons for their behaviour.
- Even though someone may have made a vexatious complaint in the past, it cannot be assumed that any other complaint they make will also be vexatious.

VEXACIOUS

A complaint may be deemed as vexatious when the complainant's behaviour is disproportionate to the matter in discussion. For example where the complainant:

- fails to clearly identify the substance of the complaint to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts to assist the complainant to do so
- complains about trivial matters to an extent which is disproportionate to their significance
- persists in pursuing a complaint which has already been investigated and provides no new material information
- prolongs contact by continually changing the substance of a complaint or by continually raising further concerns or questions whilst the complaint is being addressed
- makes excessive contact or seeks to impose unreasonable demands or expectations on the IFA, such as responses being provided more urgently than is reasonable or necessary, insisting on speaking to particular individuals, addressing a number of recipients in regards to the same matter.

MANAGING VEXACIOUS COMPLAINTS

Managing vexatious complaints can be very time consuming and is a matter of professional judgement. The Case Examiners will take advice from the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee as necessary.

- a) Careful consideration will need to be given to complaints received that are slightly different from the original complaint that concern the same broad area of activity. A decision will be made as to whether or not the matters are sufficiently different to justify being considered a new complaint. Equally, if a complainant keeps making complaints about different matters, each complaint shall be considered in the same manner unless they are about entirely trivial matters.
- b) If a complainant does act excessively they will be warned to discontinue their current behaviour and 'cease and desist'. They will also be informed that this will be logged on file.
- c) Where it is decided that the complaint is vexatious, the matter may be closed with the consent of the Chair of the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee (or in their

absence by whoever is acting in that role). The complainant will be informed in writing of the decision and advised that the IFA will not enter into any further correspondence about the matter.

AGGRESSIVE & OTHER UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

The IFA recognises the importance of meeting service user's expectations of a high standard of service but not at the cost of the abuse of its services or the mistreatment of its staff. People under stress or who are feeling angry or upset may react in an abusive or aggressive manner. However, when dealing with such a complainant a balance must be drawn between the ability and desire to assist a complainant and what can reasonably be achieved in the circumstances. It is not acceptable for staff members to be faced with verbal aggression or abuse under any circumstance. Personal safety of staff must never be compromised.

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

- Behaviour which is threatening and may result in physical harm. It includes physical violence, intimidation and harassment.
- If a staff member receives a complaint in person and the complainant's behaviour causes staff to feel afraid and/or threatened including angry physical gestures, persistent invasion of personal space and threatening language (written or oral).
- Verbally aggressive behaviour (written or oral), foul language, rudeness, derogatory remarks, inflammatory statements.
- Personal abuse such as offensive sexual or racial remarks or offensive remarks about a person's disability, personal attacks on a staff member's character, ability and subjective conjecture about conduct.

MANAGING AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Managing aggressive complainants can be upsetting for the staff member and is a matter of professional judgement of the staff member concerned. Please note staff members are instructed not to enter into discussion regarding the contents of complaints in person or over the telephone and will simply explain the procedure to raise a complaint and direct the complainant to complete the complaints form. The only exception to this rule is when the complainant requires additional assistance and the staff member will complete the form on behalf of the complainant and read it back to them for confirmation. The staff member will not comment or make a judgment on the claims being made.

- a) If the complainant persists in calling to discuss a complaint after being provided instruction or if they display an unacceptable level of abuse or aggression, they will be informed their behaviour is unacceptable and to desist. This will be considered an initial warning. The staff member will, wherever possible, provide the complainant with the opportunity to modify their behaviour, by informing the complainant that unless they do so, the call will be terminated. If the complainant does not cease their unacceptable behaviour it is reasonable for the staff member to terminate the telephone conversation. If a call needs to be terminated as a result of the complainant's conduct, the staff member should do this politely and record what occurred. The staff member will record what occurred and inform the Operations Manager.
- b) On the rare occasion a staff member receives a complaint in person and the complainant becomes aggressive, abusive or displays a high level of distress; the

staff member will bring the meeting/interaction to an end. As far as is reasonably possible, the decision to end the meeting should be clearly and politely explained, so that the complainant does not feel that they are being dismissed or the complaint is being ignored. The staff member should inform the complainant of the protocol for raising complaints in writing and that it may only be pursued further by written correspondence. The staff member will record what occurred and inform the Operations Manager.

- c) The Case Examiners will address written correspondence in the first stage of the complaint's procedure. They will review the case and may explain to the complainant that the tone of their correspondence is unacceptable and that no further correspondence will be entered into unless their tone is amended. Equally, if correspondence continues to be predominantly abusive or threatening, it is acceptable not to reply but leave the correspondence on the file with a note explaining why no reply has been sent. Where it is decided that the complainant is abusive they will relinquish correspondence with the complainant, the matter may be closed with the consent of the Chair of the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee (or in their absence by whoever is acting in that role). The complainant will be informed in writing of the decision and advised that the IFA will not enter into any further correspondence about the matter.
- d) In extreme cases, for example where there are direct and credible threats towards an individual, the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee Chair or CEO may decide to refer the matter to the police.

10. WARNING

- 10.1 In some cases, the Case Examiners may determine that there is not a realistic prospect of the complaint being upheld as misconduct or unfit to practice level and may therefore consider whether issuing a warning to the Registrant would be more appropriate.
- 10.2 In deciding whether to issue a warning, consideration will be given to:
 - a) whether the matter complained of, is repeated or if there is a pattern of behaviour and if so, considering the likelihood of it recurring.
 - b) the facts and any inconsistencies in evidence e.g. times, places etc.
- 10.3 When determining if a warning is appropriate, a detailed enquiry need not be undertaken, as the Case Examiners only need to be satisfied that on the balance of probabilities the complaint would not succeed. This decision will be ratified by the Chair of the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee.
- 10.4 If a warning is issued the complainant will be informed.
- 10.5 Warnings will be held on file and used to identify patterns of behaviour.
- 10.6 Warnings will not be published as the evidence provided, oral or otherwise will not have been cross examined.

11. DECIDING HOW TO DEAL WITH THE COMPLAINT

If a complaint is upheld the Case Examiners will then decide if it will address the complaint informally or formally. This decision will be ratified by the Chair of the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee.

12. INFORMALLY

- a) If there is no suggestion that the client is at risk or has been harmed, the complaint is likely to be dealt with informally. The IFA will make the complainant aware when it would be appropriate to deal with the complaint informally. The IFA may ask the complainant how they wish the Registrant to resolve the situation e.g. apologise, and the IFA will ask the Registrant if they agree to do. If the client or the Registrant does not agree that the complaint should be dealt with informally, or as progress is made, the nature of the complaint changes, the complaint will be dealt with formally.
- b) In some cases, especially where a complaint is between an IFA Registrant and another healthcare practitioner, the IFA may suggest that the complainant and Registrant undertake mediation. This is to try and help both parties to find a way to resolve the problem before the complaint is dealt with at a formal level. Equally, it may also be recommended where impairment is minor and isolated in nature, unlikely to recur and where the Registrant fully understands the nature and effect of that impairment and has taken appropriate corrective action already. Mediation is a consensual process and will be most appropriate where issues between the Registrant and the complainant remain unresolved but would be unlikely to result in a finding of impairment to practice. Mediation is a consensual process. If the complainant or the Registrant does not agree that the complaint should be dealt with through mediation, the complaint can be dealt with formally. If a complaint is made by another healthcare practitioner, IFA Registrant or a member of the public who has no personal experience of the Registrant it is also likely that the complaint will be dealt with formally.
- c) When complaints are dealt with informally, we ask that both the complainant and the Registrant inform the IFA that a solution has been reached within four (4) weeks of the complaint being brought to the Registrants' attention. If not, the formal disciplinary procedure will be instigated.
- d) At any stage of the complaint being made, the IFA may offer informal advice to the Registrant about their future conduct.
 - The Case Examiners, may provide informal advice based on its findings and where appropriate
 - This will be drafted by the Case Examiners and approved by the Chair of the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee
 - This will be issued by the Operations Manager to the Registrant
 - The complainant will be informed that the Registrant has been issued with informal advice.
 - If the IFA does provide informal advice it will be held on the Registrants record for three (3 years)

13. FORMALLY

Some complaints cannot be dealt with informally and include, but are not limited to:-

- a) Abuse of trust – stepping outside professional boundaries and/or including financial exploitation of clients
- b) Conduct that falls below IFA standards
- c) Negligent behaviour e.g. caused by unfit to practice
- d) Unprofessional behaviour, which could bring the IFA into disrepute
- e) Professional incompetence
- f) Dishonesty
- g) Fraud or criminal acts
- h) Alcohol or substance abuse
- i) Violence
- j) Findings of other statutory regulators
- k) Registrants who receive more than two complaints of the same nature initially addressed informally

Complaints dealt with formally will follow the disciplinary procedure.

If the Case Examiners do decide to refer it to the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee, the complainant and Registrant will be written to confirming this and provided a copy of the Disciplinary and Sanctions Procedure.

14. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Although we do understand that this may be a stressful and frustrating time for you please respect our Service User Policy in all dealings with IFA staff.

Each case is individual and delays may be inevitable due to:

- Gathering information from the relevant individuals concerned
- Difficulty finding dates when individuals are available

The complainant and Registrant will be provided with anticipated timescales of dealing with complaints and will be informed of any revised timescales as and when appropriate.

15. CONFIDENTIALITY

All information shared between the parties involved, must be treated strictly private and confidential.