



Association of Business Mentors

Maintaining Professional Standards and Handling Complaints

Policy, Procedures

and

Terms of Reference

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PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND ETHICS

The Association of Business Mentors (ABM) is the independent, not-for-profit professional body for Enterprise and Business Mentors. Our purpose is to inspire and champion excellence in Business Mentoring, to advance awareness and standards in the business mentoring profession, and to make a sustainable difference to mentors, the organisations and people that they help.

A key objective of the association is to actively advance education and best practice in business mentoring and provide mentees with the confidence that our members operate within an ethical framework and conform to an accepted Code of Conduct. Both of these are important in establishing and maintaining the credibility of mentoring within the business community and to encourage growth within the profession. We believe it is in the best interests of all our members to ensure that mentoring has a high reputational standing amongst potential clients and the ABM seeks to be at the forefront of this.

Our approach to professional ethics is to formulate an ABM Code of Conduct which comprises two elements; firstly, there are a set of high level statements of principle which we expect all ABM members to comply with and, secondly, there are a set of "Best Practice" guidelines which provide an outline framework and reference point for mentors on how they may do this.

MAINTAINING STANDARDS

If our stated desire to maintain professional standards amongst our members, and within mentoring more generally, is to have any real impact within the business community, there is a need to adopt disciplinary procedures to ensure ABM members live up to the promise they make to existing and potential clients. The ABM is committed to this undertaking and has published both its Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures so that all are aware of the importance placed upon them.

Mentees may formally make a complaint against an ABM member who they believe has failed in their commitment to follow the published Code of Conduct and which they have committed to operate by. Such complaints will be dealt with on the basis of the formal process laid out by the Professional Standards and Ethic Committee of the ABM and which is available to all members and will be made available to all mentees making a complaint.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE (PSEC)

The Professional Standards and Ethics Committee (the "Committee"; "PSEC") is formed from ABM members invited and selected by the main board of the Association from within its membership base and who are judged to have the appropriate skills and experience necessary to undertake the role. ABM members are invited to inform the board, through the current Chair and/or executive officers, if they are interested in joining the Committee, and such expressions of interest will be considered by the board at its next meeting.

The Committee shall meet/confer periodically to review the current Code of Conduct and the Best Practice Guidelines and to discuss any desired or required amendments it deems necessary, referring these suggestions, if any, to the main board for approval and adoption where appropriate.

The Committee and/or the ABM, will make available, on request, a copy of its current terms of reference and operating procedures, including statistical details of complaints received and decisions reached.

There is no limit to the number of members the Committee shall have but, at the discretion of the ABM Board, this number may be limited to ensure operational efficiency.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE – TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Professional Standards and Ethics Committee (PSEC) is an appointed committee that represent the Association within the Complaints Management process. After initial assessment of a received complaint and gathering of supporting information by central administration staff, any 'open' complaint will be referred to the PSEC for further review and investigation. It is the Committee's responsibility to establish, without doubt that there has been a contravention of the Association's Code of Practice or Guidance (or both) and to establish the perceived severity of such a breach. The Committee will then collate all information and forward to the Board for final review and decision on the appropriate measures that are necessary.

It will also be the PSEC responsibility to review case findings to assess whether there is amendment required to the Association's complaints management process, which will be reviewed periodically when the committee convenes.

The PSEC has the ability to recommend to the Board, in respect of each Complaint received:-

1. That the Complaint has not been upheld and that no further action is recommended.
2. That there is insufficient evidence to assess the Complaint and that, as a result, no further action is recommended.
3. That the Complaint has been upheld and that the following sanctions against the Member are recommended:-
 - i. Formal written warning advising Member of responsibilities with regards to maintaining professional standards and ethics.
 - ii. Suspension of ABM Membership for a stated period.
 - iii. Expulsion and future exclusion from Membership of the ABM

A record of each Complaint received, the investigations undertaken and the relevant decision shall be kept by the ABM. [A list of Complaints and decisions reached is available from the ABM on request.] [The ABM will maintain and/or may publish a list of persons whom it has excluded from membership as a result of a Complaint against them being upheld.]

DISCIPLINARY PROCESS

1. Notification of a Complaint received by ABM.
2. Complainant provided with ABM powers/scope summary and details of process. Asked to complete standard Complaints Form to provide further details and identify which ABM Codes/guidelines may have been breached. This must clearly identify which ABM Rule/Guidance is perceived to have been contravened.
3. Complaint details are recorded and initial assessment of evidence against ABM Codes/guidelines undertaken. Complainant advised one of following:-
 - a. Where complaints do not relate to published ABM Codes of Practice or mentoring guidelines, the ABM cannot take the matter further and will formally advise the Complainant and Member accordingly.
 - b. The ABM reserve the right to request further information relating to the details of the complaint as necessary to help determine which, if any, of its rules and/or guidelines may have been breached.

- c. Where the matter will be taken forward, a written response will be sought from the ABM member within a stated timeframe.
4. If Complaint remains “open”, the ABM member must respond within the stipulated timeframe, where appropriate, providing any supporting evidence requested.
5. Complaint claims and ABM member responses are sent to a nominated member of the ABM Professional Standards and Ethics Committee (PSEC) who shall be designated as the Primary Committee Member responsible for this case. He/she shall be responsible for investigating the details of the Complaint and for reaching a recommended decision.
6. A Second Committee Member is assigned whose responsibility it is to review, confer, agree, dispute and/or suggest amendments to the proposed actions suggested by the Primary Committee Member having been provided with full details of the complaints process to date.
7. If both assigned Committee Members agree, the Complaint against the ABM Member together with recommended actions is forwarded for consideration by the ABM Board (who alone have the power to enforce sanctions against errant ABM members) for consideration and ratification (or otherwise) of these recommendations.
8. Once the ABM Board have considered the case, the final decision and any action decided upon will be advised to both the Complainant and Member in writing (whether in printed or electronic format) and ABM records annotated accordingly.
9. Complainant and mentor are informed of the decision of the committee following the review by the ABM Board. This decision is deemed as a final judgement and there is no process for further appeal.
10. The Complaint file is closed once the disciplinary process is completed.

APPENDIX I - ABM CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Members shall conduct their business in a professional manner and will not engage in practices which would be damaging to the business mentor market or the clients of it.
2. Members shall promote and maintain ethical standards of conduct and at all times deal fairly and honestly with all parties, and must pay due regard to the interests of their clients and treat them fairly.
3. Members shall undertake mentoring activity with due skill, care and diligence and shall not misrepresent themselves. Members should establish that they have appropriate sector knowledge and technical experience relevant to the Mentee prior to committing to an ongoing programme of support.
4. Members must take reasonable care to control and organise their affairs responsibly and effectively.
5. Members shall ensure that all communications between them and other parties is clear, fair and not misleading.
6. Members must deal with real and potential conflicts of interest openly and honestly, whether these exist between mentor and mentee or between separate clients, informing all parties concerned in a timely manner and agreeing actions to be taken to resolve any issues.
7. Members must have and provide clients with clear written terms of business.
8. Members should use all reasonable endeavours to ensure that clients are fully conversant with the mentoring process and the services they offer.
9. Members must take all reasonable precautions to keep clients information private and confidential, must undertake to return any written or other materials on demand and will only use client information solely for the purposes of advising that client and not exploit it or otherwise apply it in any other way.
10. Members shall ensure that they acknowledge their membership of the ABM, displaying its logo prominently on all relevant communications, whether printed, electronic or digital, and that they are subject to its published membership rules and regulations (as amended from time to time) without any suggestion, inference or statement that they may not be. Only current ABM affiliated full members are permitted to display the ABM logo.

APPENDIX II - BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

GENERAL

- Members should have clear procedures for registering clients
 - Acknowledgement of enquiries
 - Initial contact to discuss needs
 - Agreement of terms and issue of written terms of business
 - Prior to the commencement of mentoring activity or as soon as practicable thereafter
 - Before fees and/or other costs become payable (unless prior agreement made in exceptional circumstances)
 - In any case, within 21 working days of the mentoring activity commencing
- Terms of business must be clear and should include
 - Start date, term or duration and/or termination date
 - An explanation of fees and other costs to be met by the client including payment terms
 - Clearly identify whether fees are subject to VAT or equivalent taxes.
 - Details of all persons who will or may be involved in the provision of the mentoring activity and to whom the activity will be supplied
 - A commitment to maintain confidentiality other than for information that is already in the public domain, already in the possession of the mentor or becomes widely available in the public domain subsequently but not due to any unauthorised action by the mentor
 - Details of any agreed work schedule, programme or input commitment
 - Notice of the existence of complaints procedures and membership of the ABM
 - Other terms which may be considered binding on either mentor or mentee
- Members should comply with ABM written procedures for handling complaints that is available on demand, which includes but is not limited to :
 - Receiving, and recording the nature of the complaint
 - Appropriate investigation of the complaint
 - Rights to acknowledgement, response and details of the decision process
 - Notification of any further appeal or referral available to the client
 - Include the right to complain to the ABM where the client believes the Code of Conduct has been compromised
- Members must advise ABM of all complaints received, along with details of any resolution achieved
- Members should maintain adequate records of activity undertaken with clients, such as
 - A copy of the mentoring agreement and/or terms of business
 - Client details, contact points and business status
 - Notes of meetings and details of any agreed actions
 - Copies of documents and other material provided
 - Fees and costs paid together with any required timesheets, schedules and/or supporting documentation

- Members should hold and maintain adequate professional indemnity insurance taken out with a reputable provider

DELIVERY OF MENTORING ACTIVITIES

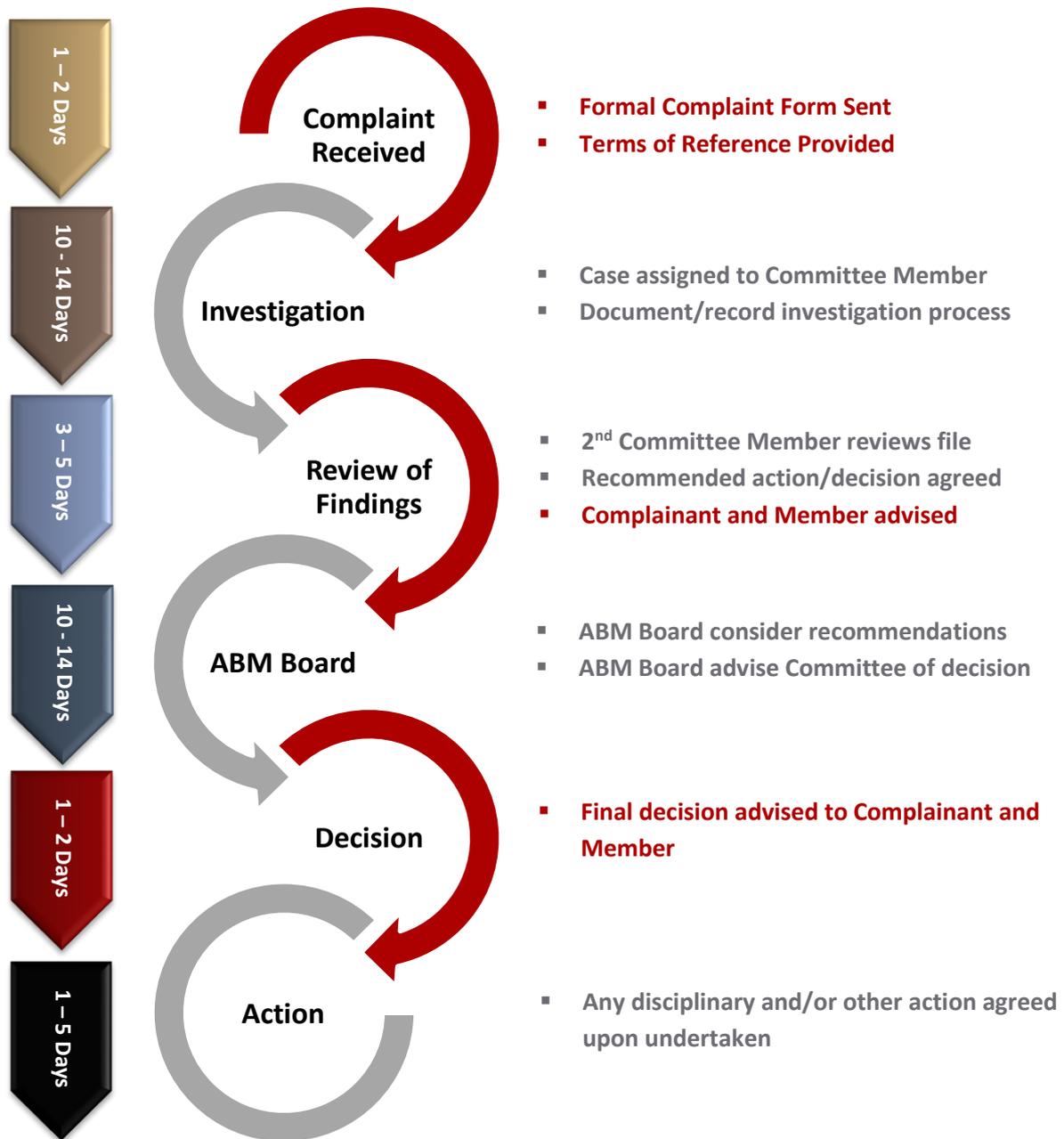
It is important that all mentoring activity is delivered in a wholly professional and ethical manner and is conducted in an appropriate venue and that the ethos of mentoring as set out above is fully observed, protecting the integrity of the Mentor, Mentee and the Association.

Members must consider and validate whether they possess the appropriate sector knowledge and experience to support the Mentee's objectives and are to deliver guidance or advice in a supportive but not instructive manner.

APPENDIX III – COMPLAINT FORM

To be designed

APPENDIX IV – DISCIPLINARY PROCESS MAP



Notes:-

- Timings given are approximate and the specific details of each case may impact upon these

APPENDIX V – COMPLAINT RECORDING

COMPLAINT RECORD ABM/CMP001

Complaint Ref ABM/C		Date Complaint Received		Medium Complaint received via		Person Recording Complaint	
Please record on Complaints Register		YES / NO		Is nature of Complaint of an Urgent Nature		YES / NO	
Headline description of complaint (enter on Register)							
Complainant's Details	Full Name				Occupation		
	Address				Postcode		
					Email		
					Phone No		
Is complaint regarding an ABM Member ?		YES / NO		If so detail Members Name			
COMPLAINT DETAILS (please list below details of complaint or cut & paste from email/website)							

Date Report Completed		Sent to Secondary Committee Member for Review <i>(date)</i>	
RECOMMENDATION OF SECONDARY COMMITTEE MEMBER			
Date Review Completed		Final Recommendation	
Records Updated?	YES / NO		
To ABM BOARD?	YES / NO	Date ABM Board due to Consider?	
Date Member Advised		Date Complainant Advised	

DECISION OF ABM BOARD			
Tick one of following:			
Recommendation of Committee accepted and approved		ACTION TO BE TAKEN:	
Recommendation of Committee accepted but revised action requested		REVISED ACTION REQUESTED:	

Recommendation of Committee rejected and Complaint dismissed			
Recommendation of Committee rejected but action requested		REVISED ACTION REQUESTED:	

FINAL DECISION			
Date Member advised		Detail how Member advised	
Date Complainant advised		Detail how Complainant advised	
Detail Internal Admin requirements and Action:			
Date File closed:			

