



ESMBA Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how complaints will be handled by the English Short Mat Bowling Association (ESMBA). The National Governing Body (NGB) for short mat bowls in England. The ESMBA is run primarily by volunteer committee members, and this policy is intended to ensure that concerns are managed fairly, consistently, proportionately, and within reasonable timescales.

The ESMBA is committed to:

- Treating all complaints seriously and respectfully
 - Providing a fair and transparent process
 - Resolving issues as early and informally as possible
 - Protecting volunteers and participants from abusive or vexatious behaviour
 - Maintaining confidentiality where appropriate
 - Learning from complaints to improve governance and participation
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2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints concerning:

- The conduct of committee members, volunteers, officials, or representatives acting on behalf of the ESMBA
- The administration or governance of the ESMBA
- Events, competitions, meetings, or programmes organised by the ESMBA
- Breaches of ESMBA policies, codes of conduct, or procedures

This policy does not apply to:

- Safeguarding concerns involving children or adults at risk
- Criminal allegations
- Employment matters
- Selection disputes where a separate appeals process exists
- Technical competition rulings made during events

Safeguarding concerns must be referred immediately to the NGB Safeguarding Lead and, where appropriate, statutory authorities.

3. Principles

All complaints will be handled according to the following principles:

Fairness

All parties will have the opportunity to present their account and respond to relevant information.

Proportionality

The response will reflect the seriousness and complexity of the issue.

Timeliness

The ESMBA will aim to deal with complaints promptly while recognising volunteer availability.

Confidentiality

Information will only be shared with those who need it to manage the complaint.

Independence

Complaints will be reviewed by individuals not directly involved in the matter.

4. Informal Resolution

Where appropriate, individuals are encouraged to try to resolve concerns informally before making a formal complaint.

This may include:

- Speaking directly with the individual involved
- Requesting clarification
- Seeking mediation through a committee member
- Raising the issue with the relevant club or event organiser

Informal resolution is not required where:

- The matter is serious
- There are safeguarding concerns
- There is alleged discrimination, harassment, or bullying
- The complainant does not feel safe addressing the matter informally

5. Making a Formal Complaint

Formal complaints should:

- Be submitted in writing by email or letter to admin@esmba.co.uk for the attention of the chair.
- Include the complainant's name and contact details
- Clearly describe the issue
- Include relevant dates, locations, witnesses, or evidence where available
- State what outcome is being sought

Anonymous complaints may be considered where there is a compelling reason, but this may limit the ability to investigate.

Complaints should normally be submitted within 3 months of the incident or issue arising.

6. Complaint Handling Procedure

Stage 1 – Acknowledgement

The ESMBA will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 7 working days where reasonably practicable.

The acknowledgement will normally:

- Confirm receipt
- Identify the person handling the complaint
- Outline the next steps
- Provide an estimated timescale

Stage 2 – Initial Assessment

The designated committee member or complaints officer will assess:

- Whether the complaint falls within this policy
- Whether immediate action is required
- Whether the matter should be referred elsewhere
- Whether informal resolution remains appropriate

The ESMBA may decline to investigate complaints that are:

- Outside the scope of this policy
- Clearly malicious or abusive

- Repetitive without new evidence
- Trivial or disproportionate

Reasons for this decision will normally be provided in writing.

Stage 3 – Investigation

Where an investigation is required, the ESMBA may:

- Request written statements
- Review documents or communications
- Interview relevant individuals
- Appoint an independent panel or investigator if appropriate

All parties are expected to cooperate respectfully.

Investigations will be completed in a timely manner, with the aim that they are completed within 28 days, although complex matters may take longer.

Stage 4 – Outcome

The complainant will normally receive a written outcome which may include:

- Whether the complaint was upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld
- Any actions or recommendations
- Any sanctions or governance actions (where appropriate)
- Information about any right of appeal

The ESMBA may limit the detail shared where confidentiality obligations apply.

7. Appeals

A complainant may appeal a decision if:

- There was a procedural error
- Relevant new evidence has emerged
- The outcome was unreasonable based on the available evidence

Appeals must normally be submitted within 14 days of the outcome.

Appeals should:

- Be made in writing
- Clearly state the grounds for appeal
- Include any supporting information

Appeals will normally be reviewed by committee members or an appeal panel not previously involved in the matter.

The appeal decision will be final within the ESMBA's internal processes.

8. Conduct During Complaints

The ESMBA expects all parties to behave respectfully throughout the process.

Abusive, threatening, discriminatory, or harassing behaviour toward volunteers, committee members, staff, or participants may result in:

- Restrictions on communication
 - Suspension from events or activities
 - Disciplinary action under relevant ESMBA rules
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9. Vexatious or Persistent Complaints

The ESMBA may restrict or discontinue correspondence where a complainant:

- Repeatedly raises the same issue without new evidence
- Uses abusive or unreasonable behaviour
- Makes excessive or disproportionate demands on volunteers
- Pursues complaints primarily to harass or disrupt

Any such decision will be proportionate and recorded.

10. Record Keeping and Data Protection

The ESMBA will:

- Keep appropriate records of complaints and outcomes
- Store information securely
- Process personal data in accordance with applicable data protection legislation

Records will only be retained for as long as necessary.

11. Safeguarding and Welfare

Nothing in this policy prevents the ESMBA from taking immediate action where participant welfare or safeguarding is at risk.

Safeguarding concerns should be referred immediately to:

- The ESMBA Safeguarding Lead
 - Relevant statutory authorities where appropriate
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12. Equality and Inclusion

The ESMBA is committed to handling complaints fairly and without discrimination.

Reasonable adjustments will be considered where required to support accessibility or participation.

13. Policy Review

This policy should be reviewed every [2] years or earlier if:

- Legal or regulatory requirements change
 - Governance structures change
 - Significant issues arise from complaints handling
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Appendix A – Suggested Complaint Submission Form

Complainant Details

- Name:
- Address:
- Email:
- Telephone:

Details of Complaint

- Date(s) of incident:
- Location/event:
- Individuals involved:

- Description of complaint:

Supporting Information

- Witnesses:
- Documents/screenshots attached:

Desired Outcome

Please explain what resolution you are seeking.

Appendix B – Example Timescales

Stage	Target Timescale
Acknowledgement	Within 7 working days
Initial assessment	Within 14 working days
Investigation outcome	Normally within 28 days
Appeal submission	Within 14 days of outcome
Appeal outcome	Normally within 28 days

Appendix C – Committee Guidance Notes

Because the organisation is volunteer-run:

- Committee members should avoid conflicts of interest
 - Complaints should not be handled by individuals directly involved in the matter
 - Reasonable delays may occur during holiday periods or competition seasons
 - External mediation or independent review may be used for serious or sensitive matters
 - The welfare and sustainability of volunteers should be considered when managing complaints
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