



BSHAA CUSTOMER CARE SCHEME

ONE YEAR ON

The first annual report of the Customer Care Scheme run by the British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists

INTRODUCTION

The British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists is the professional body representing 75% of the hearing aid dispensers in private practice in the United Kingdom.

In April 2010 the regulation of Hearing Aid Dispensers became the responsibility of the Health Professions Council which has around 1600 dispensers on its register. By law, only they can assess or test hearing or prescribe hearing aids with a view to selling them.

BSHAA set up the Customer Care Scheme, or CCS, in early 2010, to provide assistance to customers who had complaints about the service they received from a Scheme company.

The CCS was developed in consultation with the charity, Action on Hearing Loss (formerly the RNID).

At the end of the first year, 97 companies (large and small) representing just over 800 dispensers (or about 50% of all registered dispensers) are participating in the Scheme. Seventy per cent of BSHAA's members take part.

Annually the private sector dispenses around 200,000 hearing instruments.

In its first year, the BSHAA Customer Care Scheme received and dealt with 30 complaints involving 51 customers, in a practical and independent manner to the benefit of all concerned.

This report reviews the work of the first year outlining the complaints and how they have been resolved as well as identifying the lessons to be learned for the future.

THE BSHAA CUSTOMER CARE SCHEME – WHAT IS IT?

Despite everyone's best efforts, things can go wrong in any business and the BSHAA Customer Care Scheme is a fuss free way of helping companies and customers resolve complaints. It's a way of giving customers greater confidence: if they deal with a Scheme member, they know there is someone to help if things go wrong. It also gives them protection which is often better than that offered under legislation.

To be a member of the Scheme, Companies must have their own user-friendly internal complaints resolution

procedure which promises to respond to complaints quickly and to try and resolve them within a maximum of twenty days. At the beginning of their relationship with a customer,

they must be given an approved leaflet which not only explains the Company's own complaints resolution process but outlines what the customer should do if this doesn't resolve their concerns.



This explains how to access the independent complaints resolution service operated by BSHAA, including the conciliation and arbitration stages.

BSHAA Customer Care complaint handling processes are designed to comply with the Consumer Code approved by the Office of Fair Trading.

Companies take part in the Customer Care Scheme because they believe that it gives their customers reassurance about the quality of their service, backed up by the transparent complaints resolution process.

HOW IT WORKS

When a complaint is made to BSHAA the customer is asked if they have tried to resolve the matter directly with the Company which provided their hearing care. If they have not they are directed back to the Company.

If the customer has tried the Company's own procedures and is still not satisfied, BSHAA will investigate.

BSHAA will collate information from the Complainant and the Company and this is then assessed by an independent qualified audiologist who will offer a professional view of the circumstances.

Using this assessment, BSHAA will seek a practical solution that is agreeable to both parties. As well as conciliation the Scheme may, in certain circumstances, offer arbitration – all at no cost to the Customer.

Although the BSHAA Scheme cannot help Customers facing a loss of service from companies which have ceased trading, it will still attempt, on a goodwill basis, to identify another willing local Company to take over their care.

During the year under review, 18 customers of a Company which had gone into administration and ceased trading were helped by the BSHAA Scheme in this way.

During a legal review in May 2010 criteria were established under which the Scheme should pass the more serious cases to the industry Regulator, the Health Professions Council.

When these cases arise the Scheme will advise the dispenser concerned and/or their employer so that they can refer the matter to the HPC. If this has not been done within a week the Scheme will refer the matter.

The British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists also has its own Codes of Practice and can take action against a member if it is appropriate.

SUMMARY OF THE BENEFITS

For the customer:

- It's a free and easy way to solve any problems that arise
- Friendly conciliation between both parties –is the heart of the scheme with the possibility of arbitration should it become necessary
- Practical assistance where the dispenser is no longer available, by putting the customer in touch with another dispenser
- Complaints that might not be considered under Sale of Goods legislation can be dealt with

For the Company:

- Complaints resolved by an independent, unbiased third party
- A benefit they can advertise which may give extra confidence to their customers and potential customers about how they deal with any problem arising from the sale, or during aftercare

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

During the year under review the Scheme dealt with 30 cases involving 51 people (18 complaints related to one company which had gone into administration). Nine of the complaints were ruled invalid, mainly because the complainants did not have realistic expectations. In one case the complainant had altered copies of letters she had sent to the dispensing company. Three of the complaints came via the BHTA Code of Practice.

Eighteen people contacted the Scheme after the firm which had supplied their hearing care went out of business. Although new owners of the Company did provide some assistance this ended in September 2010. The Scheme managed to find other dispensing companies willing to provide aftercare.

Seven of the complaints related to the time it took a Company to make a refund. The Scheme helped all of these customers to obtain a refund and where the issue was due to poor administration the company agreed to review its processes. There were three complaints about non-professional behaviour and one relating to poor servicing.

One case related to a customer who was fitted inadvertently with hearing aids that were not the ones that had been ordered and although the Company immediately offered a generous refund this

complaint was considered sufficiently serious to warrant a BSHAA Disciplinary Hearing against the dispenser who was a member of the Society. As a result the company agreed to review its internal procedures.

Just two complaints have involved the Regulatory body, both relating to complaints from customers who had not been able to contact the Company with whom they had done business. The Society helped five of these customers to find another dispenser. In the other case, the second dispenser had moved abroad. Both cases have been the subject of an enquiry by the Health Professions Council.

Appendix A provides a summary of the complaints that were raised in the first year of the scheme.

MEASURING SUCCESS

- The positive contribution the Customer Care Scheme makes to the delivery of independent hearing care is not only measured by the number of complaints it has been able to resolve. It has led to:
- Some participating Companies setting up their own internal complaint procedure for the first time, so they are allowed to join the scheme
- Companies with existing complaints procedures reviewing those procedures as part of the process of registering as members of the Customer Care Scheme
- In some cases Companies strengthened their procedures in light of this review
- There has been greater recognition within independent hearing care of the value and importance of listening to customer feedback and complaints and a more pro-active stance to customer care
- Practitioners are provided with advice and guidance on the need for clear accurate record keeping, essential if complaints are to be resolved fairly

It would be easy, but foolish to assume that if a complaint has been resolved the Customer is happy with the process. Consequently, when a complaint has been finalised we ask the Customer to complete a feedback form. Of the 25 forms sent to complainants eight were returned. As can be seen from Table 1, all but one respondent rated the Scheme administration as either good or excellent.

	Poor	OK	Good	Excellent
How quickly did we respond?	0	0	2	6
How well were you kept informed?	0	1	2	5
How courteous were we?	0	0	1	7
Were our communications helpful?	0	0	2	6

Table 1, Scheme Administration Feedback

REACTION TO THE SCHEME

The scheme has been welcomed by Action on Hearing Loss (formerly the RNID) and by the Health Professions Council. Jackie Ballard, Chief Executive of AoHL describes the scheme as: “a user-friendly means of resolving complaints about service from hearing aid dispensers.”

She went on: “The scheme gives customers an expectation from the start that the company will resolve any problems. But if this does not happen, they can take the problem to BSHAA without needing to decide whether the issue is professional, commercial or both and worrying about where to take their complaint.

“They should also be assured that any clear failure to comply with standards set for dispensers as health professionals will be referred to the regulator.

“The scheme has potential to increase people’s confidence in the private hearing aid sector, and the more companies that participate, the stronger this effect will be. Both service users and service providers benefit from improved self-regulation and this report on the first year of the BSHAA Customer Care Scheme shows how this can work.”

GOING FORWARD

The Society is justly proud of the success of the Customer Care Scheme in this, its first full year, but accepts that there is still work to do to.

The next development step will be to provide a monitoring service to test compliance and BSHAA will be liaising with the BHTA who have experience in this area to find out how this can best be achieved.

The Society is also conscious that to be truly successful it must have the maximum support of the independent hearing care sector. Consequently it will be actively promoting the scheme to all dispensing companies in the coming year to get even greater participation.

September 2011

APPENDIX A

Summary of complaints received during the first year of the scheme's operation

1. BSHAA have dealt with 30 cases of complaint on behalf of 51 customers during the first year of operation of the Customer Care Scheme.
2. Of the 30 closed cases:
 - a. **9 customers did not have a valid complaint which resulted mainly from unrealistic customer expectations.** Some examples of these are:
 - Request for a refund for mis-selling and poor aftercare but they waited 5 years before making a complaint– even so the dispensing company offered a discount on a new pair of aids.
 - Request for a refund after two years, as NHS aids had been fitted.
 - One customer made a complaint but ‘altered’ copies of letters that she had originally sent to the dispensing company and could not provide medical evidence to back up the claim which we requested.
 - b. A company which bought another out of administration in 2009 had no responsibility for the care of pre-existing customers. However it did provide some assistance until about September 2010. After that time 18 customers contacted the Scheme which was able to assist in finding other dispensers to provide aftercare. It then asked the company to send a letter to ex-customers of

the company in administration advising them that they were not providing any further care and to contact BSHAA for further advice.

- c. 6 customers dropped their complaint and/or they were resolved to the customer's satisfaction without using the full BSHAA CCS process.
- d. 2 complaints concerned customers not being able to contact their dispenser. One dispenser operating from abroad was subject to an HPC enquiry and is no longer a BSHAA member. With regard to the other dispenser, BSHAA assisted five customers by finding them another dispenser who would provide them with aftercare services – this second dispenser has been subject to an HPC enquiry and is no longer a member of BSHAA.
- e. 1 customer was inadvertently fitted with aids different to those ordered – the company immediately offered a generous refund. This complaint was considered sufficiently serious to warrant a BSHAA Disciplinary hearing. The outcome of which was for the company concerned to improve their internal procedures.
- f. 7 customers had waited some while for a refund or for a refund to be agreed – BSHAA helped all of these customers to get their refund and where the issue was due to poor administration the company agreed to improve their process.
- g. 3 customers complained of non-professional behaviour – the companies concerned acknowledged this and apologised.

- h. 1 case of poor servicing (the third case under the BHTA Code) resulted in the customer receiving a new replacement aid within less than one month of the complaint being advised to BSHAA.

APPENDIX B

Current list of companies participating in the BSHAA Customer Care Scheme and those who are members of BHTA

Company	BHTA
150 Harley St Ltd	
ABC Hearing Aid Consultancy	
Aberdeen Hearing Services Ltd	
Advanced Hearing Services Ltd	
Affordable Hearing (Nottingham) Ltd	
Amanda Banham	
Amplifon Ltd	
Anglian Hearing Healthcare Ltd	
Ascent Hearing Care - all branches	Yes
Aston Hearing Services	
Banbury Hearing Centre	
Better Hearing Scotia	
Binns Hearing Healthcare	
Broom Reid & Harris	
Campbell Hearing Aids	
Celtic Hearing	
Central Hearing Services (Dudley 1966) Ltd	
Christian Hearing Services Ltd	Yes
Clarity Hearing Ltd	
Clear Hear Ltd	
ClearerHearing Ltd	
Click Hearing Ltd	
C Stanley Hearing Aid Services Ltd	Yes
Cotswold Hearing Centre	
County Hearing Aid Centre	
Cubex	
Desmond & Co.	
Devon Hearingcare	Yes
Digital Hearing Care	Yes
Discount Hearing Ltd	

B & E Morgan Hearing Ltd	
Easi-Ear	
Ebor Hearing Healthcare	
Essex Hearing Aids Ltd	
Gareth R Morris	
Gary Parker Hearing Systems Ltd	
Girlings Complete Hearing Aid Service	
Hampshire Hearing Ltd	Yes
The Hearing Aid Advice Centre Ltd	
Hearing Aid Solutions Ltd	
Hearing Centre (Midlands) Ltd	
Hearing Healthcare Centre	
Hearing Solutions Ltd	
Hearing World	Yes
Hearshop.co.uk	
Hearwell Direct Ltd	
Help Hearing (UK) Ltd	
Help in Hearing	Yes
Heritage Hearing Ltd	
H G Houston - Hearing Aid Specialist	
Hidden Hearing Ltd - all branches	Yes
Honiton Hearing Centre	
Horsham Hearing Centre	
J N Murray Ltd	Yes
Kellear Hearing	
Kind Hearing	
Lanes Hearing Aids	
The Langley Audiology Centre Ltd	
London Hearing	
Lotus Hearing Aid Centre	Yes
Maldan Audiological Consultants	
Mary Hare Hearing Care	
Michelle McCreesh	
Mills & McKinney	Yes
Monmouthshire Hearing Centre	
Moray Hearing Care Ltd	Yes
Northern Acoustics	

Northumbria Hearing	
Optique Sight & Hearing Expertise	
Owen Hearing Ltd	
Paul Darroch FSHAA	
PC Werth Consulting Services	
Peninsular Hearing Care	
Personal Hearing Solutions	
Phillip Ball	
Pure Hearing Ltd	
Preston Hearing Centre	
Precision Hearing Ltd	
Professional Hearing Care Ltd	
Reigate Hearing Centre	
Regional Health Services - all branches	
R Evans Hearing Care	
Samuel Lewis Hearing Aids	
Scotia Hearing Ltd	Yes
Simply Hear Ltd	
Sound Hearing Ltd	
Sound Principles Hearing	
Sound Sense Consulting	Yes
Specsavers Hearcare - all branches	
Spen Valley Hearing Care Ltd	
Surrey Hearing Services Ltd	
Sutton Hearing Care	
Suzanne Stevenson	
The Eastbourne Hearing Centre Ltd	
The Hearing Care Centre, Colchester	Yes
The Hearing Care Centre Ltd	Yes
The Hearing Care Centre, Ponteland	
The Hearing Company - all branches	
The Hearing Practice	
The Karim Fayed Hearing Centre at Harrods	
The Private Hearing Aid Company Ltd	
Wealden Hearing	
West Country Clinical Hearing Services	

Wight Sound Hearing Ltd	Yes
Yorkshire Hearing Care Ltd	
