



**DVACT-PAI**  
Assessments & Interventions

# **Professional Conduct Procedure for Registered Expert Domestic Abuse Risk Assessors**



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# Contents

1. Introduction
  - 1.1 Key Terms
2. Who can raise a concern?
3. Threshold test
4. Letter of advice
5. Investigation and assessment of complaints
6. Procedure for serious complaints
7. Protocol for Complaints Concerning Expert Opinion Within Court Proceedings
8. Protocol for Frivolous or Vexatious Complaints

## **1. Introduction**

We handle Registered Assessor complaints through our professional conduct procedure (PCP), which offers a transparent complaint avenue while ensuring efficient, effective, and proportionate resolution.

As the Registering Authority, DVACT-PAI is committed to upholding rigorous standards that build public confidence in expert domestic abuse assessment. Our Register actively protects not only the public but also preserves the integrity of our professional community and the diverse disciplines encompassed by our Ethical Framework.

It is the responsibility of all Assessors and Complainants to ensure that they fully understand this procedure and associated protocols. Assessors are expected to inform any service users or commissioners who indicate that they have a complaint or grievance about the existence of this Procedure and any other applicable complaints or disciplinary procedures.

If requested to do so, practitioners should inform their clients about how they may obtain further information concerning this procedure, including via the DVACT-PAI website.

When you submit a complaint through this channel, you're giving us permission to share your complaint details and supporting documents with the Assessor in question. This transparency ensures everyone involved understands the concerns raised as we follow our standard resolution process.

Further information may be obtained by directly contacting the Professional Conduct Team at DVACT-PAI; alternatively, all documentation is available via the DVACT-PAI website.

## **2. Who can raise a concern?**

A concern can be raised about the professional conduct of an assessor from:

- anyone who is currently receiving an assessment from an assessor
- anyone who has received an assessment within the last year\*
- anyone who wishes to raise a concern on behalf of someone who's attended an assessment who is under the age of 16
- a family member or a relevant professional representative who wishes to raise a concern on behalf of someone vulnerable
- a family member of a deceased relative who was in receipt of an assessment by an assessor

Once a concern is received it will be assessed by our Professional Conduct Team who will determine whether it can proceed.

If you have any questions about an assessment or whether you're able to raise a concern about a registered assessor we would encourage you to contact our Professional Conduct Team.

\*You can still submit complaints about assessments over a year old, but an independent panel will decide if it's in the public interest to consider them.

### **3. Threshold Test**

Every complaint we receive is reviewed by a complaints manager. They will check whether the complaint, if proved, would mean that the member failed to meet our professional standards.

They will also check that the complaint is not vexatious or frivolous (ie made to cause annoyance and with no serious purpose or value) or whether the complaint concerns the assessors independent expert opinion, in which case the complaint should be addressed within the court process.

We may ask for further information from the person making the complaint and the assessor. This may include a preliminary response from the assessor.

If the complaint passes the threshold test, we'll inform the complainant and the assessor.

If the complaint doesn't pass the threshold test, we will tell the complainant and the assessor and close the complaint.

#### **Right of appeal**

A complainant may only appeal against a decision to close the complaint if they have convincing new evidence that was not available at the time of the test.

#### **4. Letter of advice**

Professional standards matter, even in minor cases. That's why we provide written guidance to assessors who commit technical breaches—offering them a clear path to improvement rather than immediate penalties. However, accountability remains essential: assessors must acknowledge their shortcomings, and we maintain these records for three years. This balanced approach protects standards while allowing for professional growth, yet enables us to identify concerning patterns should similar complaints arise during this period.

#### **Right of appeal**

There is no right of appeal for the assessor or the complainant if the complaint is dealt with by a letter of advice.

## **5. Investigation and Assessment of Complaints**

Complaints about more serious issues are sent to the Investigation and Assessment Committee (IAC). This is a panel of three registered assessors. The IAC may request further information or, in exceptional circumstances, interview those involved in a complaint.

It can make the following decisions:

- deal with the complaint by means of consensual disposal
- suspend registration through an interim suspension order
- refer the complaint to a disciplinary hearing
- refer the complaint to a practice review hearing
- dismiss the complaint

The IAC is also responsible for deciding whether complaints that have previously been considered can be reconsidered in the light of new evidence.

### **Consensual disposal**

When members take responsibility by admitting to professional standards breaches and accepting sanctions, the IAC efficiently resolves complaints through consensual disposal. This transparent process ensures accountability, with all agreements and sanctions publicly documented in the Notices section of our website.

This final resolution cannot be appealed by either assessors or complainants, providing definitive closure for all parties involved.

### **Interim suspension order**

If considered necessary for public protection, the IAC can suspend a member from registration for up to 12 months while the complaint is taken to a disciplinary hearing.



## **Disciplinary hearing**

The IAC can refer allegations of serious breaches of professional standards to a disciplinary hearing, heard by a Professional Conduct Panel.

If the complaint is upheld, the panel can impose sanctions on the assessor, including suspending or withdrawing registration.

## **Practice review hearing**

The IAC can refer complaints about the professional service provided by a member to a practice review hearing, heard by a Professional Conduct Panel.

These are less formal hearings which aim to find a resolution acceptable to both the complainant and the assessor.

If poor service is proved, and the parties can't agree, the panel can impose sanctions on the assessor.

## **Complaint dismissed**

The IAC may decide there's no case to answer and the complaint will not be taken any further. We will tell the complainant the reasons for this decision and let the assessor know.

## **Right of appeal**

The complainant can ask for a review of the IAC's decision.

## 6. Procedure for serious complaints

Our rigorous discretionary procedure exists specifically to address the most serious complaints that fall outside the PCP framework. When faced with issues of significant gravity—such as criminal convictions or employer-imposed disciplinary actions—this procedure provides the appropriate pathway for resolution.

This procedure demands substantial supporting evidence and cannot replace official investigations or address personal matters.

Each case is meticulously evaluated on its individual merits, ensuring fair treatment throughout. Only when sufficient evidence exists will an independent panel determine whether implementation is warranted, guaranteeing both thoroughness and impartiality in our process.

It will consider whether the member's actions have or may:

- bring the profession into disrepute
- impede the legitimate activities of DVACT-PAI
- misrepresent their registration status
- amount to a serious breach of the *Ethical Framework*

The only sanction is withdrawal of registration.

If you are considering submitting information for this procedure, please discuss it with us first.

## **7. Protocol for Complaints Concerning Expert Opinion Within Court Proceedings**

The complaint review process ensures that matters are directed through the most appropriate channels for resolution. When a Professional Conduct Team case manager evaluates a complaint, they specifically distinguish between professional standards violations and challenges to an assessor's expert opinion.

Expert opinions should be addressed through proper judicial channels—either through court testimony or formal written inquiries. To ensure fairness, case managers consult with relevant experts before making determinations.

Should a complaint be classified as challenging expert opinion, complainants will receive a clear written explanation outlining the reasoning. Once this determination is made, the matter is closed permanently with no further correspondence entertained.

## **8. Protocol for Frivolous or Vexatious Complaints**

Our Case Managers protect the integrity of our complaint process by carefully evaluating each submission. They conduct thorough investigations to distinguish genuine grievances from frivolous or vexatious claims—ensuring that valuable resources focus on legitimate concerns. When necessary, they consult with relevant experts to guarantee fair, informed decisions.

DVACT-PAI takes all complaints seriously, but must protect Assessors from those filed in bad faith. When a complaint is determined to be frivolous or vexatious—meaning it was designed to harass, distress, or trouble the Assessor rather than address a genuine concern—we will provide clear written justification for this classification.

Once this determination is made, the matter is closed permanently with no further correspondence entertained.

This may include:

- complaints which have already been investigated and contain no new or material information
- cases where the Complainant changes the substance of a complaint or raises further trivial or unrelated concerns or questions while the complaint is being addressed
- complaints with no clear substance or where the Complainant does not articulate the precise issues, which may need to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts to conduct such investigations
- complaints which focus solely on trivial matters
- complaints which are malicious, false or otherwise intended to cause harm or distress to an Assessor.