

Complaints Policy

Owner/s:	Mike Wade, Director of Fundraising and Communications
Author/s	Ben McNaught/Lisa Foster
Issuing Team/Dept.	Fundraising and Communications
Version no:	2
Date Approved:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDs • Committee • Trustee Board 	<p>18 April 2016</p> <p>July 2016</p>
Review Frequency:	3 years
Next Review Date:	2019-20
Circulation (primary location)	Website

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 NDCS is committed to providing an excellent service to its members and other stakeholders, working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect.
- 1.2 NDCS views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person that has made the complaint. As such, this policy also outlines the importance of making our complaints process transparent and accessible to all users.

2. Key Aims

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is:
 - a) To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
 - b) To make sure everyone at NDCS knows what to do if a complaint is received
 - c) To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
 - d) To make sure that wherever possible, complaints are resolved to the satisfaction of all parties involved, and that relationships are repaired
 - e) To gather information which helps us to improve what we do
 - f) To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint

3. Principles

- 3.1 Accessibility
 - a) NDCS aims to make it as easy as possible for complainants to communicate with us in order to make a complaint and access our complaints policy. A copy of our complaints policy will always be available on the NDCS website(s) and copies will also be posted/emailed out on request.
 - b) A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, electronically or in writing. This may be directly from the complainant or via a third party. For complaints made by deaf children and young people, or relating to Deaf Child Worldwide (DCW), assistance may be needed to do this, and NDCS (or their partners for DCW) should help complainants to present their complaint if required.
- 3.2 Confidentiality
 - a) All complaint information will follow any relevant data protection requirements. Reports on complaints that are shared as part of learning will be anonymised.
 - b) Where complaints need to be kept confidential in order to safeguard those making or involved in the complaint, we will only involve third parties in the resolution of confidential complaints on a case-by-case basis and with the agreement of the complainant. The exception to this may be any complaints involving suspected criminal activities, or those relating to safeguarding children, where NDCS may have a legal duty to share information with the authorities.

- c) Complaints that indicate that a possible criminal offence has been committed should be referred to the relevant authorities responsible for investigating such matters. The complainant would ideally be responsible for doing this, but where appropriate it could also be done by NDCS or its partners.
- d) Further guidance on this can be found in other NDCS policies (depending on the nature of the complaint), including the Information Sharing and Confidentiality Policy, Anti-Corruption Policy, Anti-Bribery Policy, Anti-Money Laundering Policy, Data Protection Policy and the Child Protection Policy.

3.3 Transparency and timeliness

- a) NDCS aims to acknowledge complaints within two working days of receiving them. We aim to provide a full response to the majority of complaints within five working days. However, there may be complex complaints that require a longer period of investigation and in these cases we would always aim to provide a full response within twenty five working days (twenty working days for work regulated by the Care Inspectorate). It is important that NDCS is transparent with how it deals with complaints and keeps complainants fully apprised of what is happening with their complaint, along with any amended timescales if circumstances dictate a longer period is required. Complaints should be made within 3 months of the relevant incident. In exceptional circumstances NDCS may be able to respond to a complaint that is older, although the passage of time may make it harder to resolve the complaint satisfactorily.

3.4 Right to appeal

- a) Complainants who are unsatisfied with NDCS's response to that complaint have the right to appeal via internal escalation within NDCS. If complainants are still unhappy with the response from NDCS they have the right to take their complaint to the relevant external regulating bodies. The primary bodies in the UK are the Charity Commission (England and Wales) ¹, The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) ², while specific fundraising complaints are covered by the Fundraising Regulator. In Scotland, any complaints relating to NDCS services providing care of deaf children or young people can also be raised with Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (also known as the Care Inspectorate) at Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee, DD1 4NY (enquiries@sssc.uk.com). Nothing in this policy should be understood as taking away the right of any individual, group or organisation to seek redress under any relevant legislation. The specific appeal processes are available from NDCS on request.

¹ The Charity Commission will only take action for complaints that sit within their terms of reference, which are outlined at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission/about>.

² The OSCR's guidance can be found at <http://www.oscr.org.uk/charities/raise-a-concern-about-a-charity>

3.5 Mutual respect

- a) Everyone who makes a complaint will be treated with courtesy and respect. In return, NDCS expects people who make a complaint to communicate their concerns fairly and appropriately. Where complainants harass staff, make threats, behave abusively, or unreasonably pursue complaints, NDCS reserves the right to withdraw or modify its adherence to the complaints process.

3.6 Part of a learning process

- a) We will log and monitor all complaints and results of such complaints as outlined in the complaints definition below. This information will be regularly collated, anonymised and then reviewed by the appropriate senior managers and trustees in order that we learn from our mistakes and ultimately provide a better service for our members and other stakeholders.

4. Scope of Complaints Policy

4.1 Who can make a complaint under this policy

- a) Complaints may come from any person or organisation that has a legitimate interest in NDCS. For Deaf Child Worldwide, NDCS will support partners to put in place the most appropriate method in order that beneficiaries can raise complaints with us either directly or via the partner.
- b) NDCS will accept anonymous complaints recognising that complaints may be legitimate and the complainant may have good reasons as to why they do not want to disclose their identity, although following up such complaints will be more difficult.

4.2 Key areas and types of complaints

- a) A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of work undertaken by NDCS or Deaf Child Worldwide that directly or indirectly cause distress to the affected party.
- b) Key areas of possible complaint may include (but are not limited to):
 - Concern from someone we work with about the quality of programme delivery
 - Concern from a member of the public or supporter about a particular fundraising approach or campaign
 - Concern about the behaviour of staff, volunteers, consultants or partners contracted to deliver on behalf of NDCS. This could include action taken or conversely, action not taken
 - Concern about HR processes and decisions
 - Concern about late payment of invoices
- c) A complaint has to be about an action for which NDCS is responsible.
- d) A complaint is not:
 - A general query about NDCS's work or a request for information

- A contractual dispute
- A request to amend records e.g. to correct an address, update communication preferences, or cancel a donation*
- A request to unsubscribe from an NDCS 'service' e.g. a campaign newsletter or email*

* unless the request had been made previously and had not been actioned by NDCS to the complainant's satisfaction

4.3 Recording, monitoring and reporting complaints

- Complaints will be recorded on NDCS's organisational database, allowing details to be logged on receipt, actions tracked and outcomes recorded. NDCS will also use this data to monitor the type of complaints received, the procedures followed and from where the complaint originates. Reports will be generated and distributed bi-annually to senior management and to the Board of Trustees annually.
- We will retain details of complaints on the database, enabling us to respond appropriately to any future queries related to the complaint and to monitor complaint levels and patterns.

4.4 Learning from complaints

- Complaints will be used to identify any issues that need to be addressed in programme delivery or ways of working. NDCS aims to adapt and evolve in response to all feedback received, as part of our quality standards cycle. Complaints should therefore be recorded in order to generate information through which possible weaknesses in assessing, planning, implementation, monitoring or evaluation can be identified. NDCS teams will review the collated complaints, agreeing improvement opportunities and next steps on a quarterly basis.

5. Management and Responsibility

- This policy is reviewed regularly and updated as required. Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Board of Trustees and its Executive Directors.