



Complaints Policy

Approved by:	Lauren Meston	Date:	20/08/2026
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1. Statement of intent

Future Pathways CIC aims to provide a high-quality, safe, inclusive and responsive alternative provision. We welcome concerns and complaints because they provide an opportunity to resolve difficulties, learn from experience and improve our service. Complaints will be handled fairly, respectfully, proportionately and without disadvantage to a young person because a concern has been raised.

Future Pathways will seek to resolve concerns as early and informally as possible, while ensuring that complainants have access to a clear formal process and an impartial review where a matter cannot be resolved at an earlier stage.

Safeguarding takes priority

A complaint must never delay safeguarding action. If information received through a complaint suggests that a child may be at risk of harm, an adult may have harmed a child, or safeguarding practice may be unsafe, the matter will be referred immediately to Lauren Meston, Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or another appropriate safeguarding route. The complaints process may continue, pause or be adapted around safeguarding, LADO, police or social-care processes.

2. Purpose and aims

- provide a simple, accessible and transparent route for raising concerns and complaints;
- resolve concerns promptly and, where possible, at the lowest appropriate level;
- ensure complaints are considered impartially and on the available evidence;
- give complainants a fair opportunity to explain their concerns and the outcome they are seeking;
- ensure staff who are complained about are treated fairly and are not presumed to have acted wrongly;
- protect confidentiality and personal information appropriately;
- identify safeguarding concerns and move them immediately into the correct safeguarding process;
- record outcomes and use learning from complaints to improve practice, policy and provision;
- maintain constructive relationships with young people, parents/carers, commissioning schools, local authorities and partner agencies.

3. Legal and guidance framework

This policy has been developed with regard to current Department for Education guidance and relevant legislation, including:

- Department for Education – best practice guidance for school/academy complaints procedures;
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule 1 Part 7, where applicable to the legal status of the provision;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (KCSIE), effective from 1 September 2026;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026;
- Equality Act 2010, including reasonable-adjustment duties;
- Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR;
- Human Rights Act 1998;
- Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership procedures and local LADO arrangements.

Future Pathways is an alternative provision provider and may work under different commissioning and registration arrangements. The precise external escalation route can therefore depend on the young person's registration, the commissioning body and the legal status of the service involved. This policy adopts a robust three-stage process as Future Pathways' minimum complaints standard. Where another statutory procedure applies, Future Pathways will explain the correct route and cooperate with the responsible body.

4. Scope: who can complain?

This procedure may be used by parents/carers of young people attending Future Pathways and, where appropriate, by young people themselves. Future Pathways will also respond respectfully and proportionately to concerns from commissioning schools, local authorities, professionals, visitors and members of the public, although a different contractual or professional-resolution route may sometimes be more appropriate.

A young person will be supported to make a complaint in an accessible way. They may ask a trusted adult or advocate to help them. The fact that a young person has complained must never result in retaliation, reduced opportunity or unfair treatment.

5. What is a complaint?

A concern is an expression of worry or dissatisfaction that may be capable of prompt informal resolution. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an action taken, a failure to act, the quality of a service, the conduct of a person acting on behalf of Future Pathways, or the way a previous concern was handled.

The complainant does not have to use the word “complaint” for this procedure to apply. Future Pathways will consider the substance of what has been raised.

6. Matters dealt with under other procedures

Some matters have separate statutory, safeguarding, employment or contractual procedures and will not normally be investigated through this policy. These include:

- a child protection or safeguarding concern requiring immediate action – Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- an allegation that an adult has harmed or may pose a risk of harm to a child – KCSIE/LADO procedure;
- a concern about adult conduct that does not meet the harm threshold – Low-Level Concerns Policy;
- a disclosure of wrongdoing in the public interest by a worker – Whistleblowing Policy;
- a staff grievance, disciplinary or capability matter – relevant employment procedure;
- statutory suspension, permanent exclusion, admission or SEND appeal matters where another legal appeal route applies;
- complaints about another organisation, commissioning school or external provider where that organisation is responsible for the matter;
- police, court, tribunal or regulatory matters where an investigation would prejudice an active process.

Where only part of a complaint falls within another process, Future Pathways may deal with the remaining issues under this policy. The complainant will be told which procedure applies, subject to confidentiality and safeguarding restrictions.

7. Safeguarding, KCSIE and complaints

KCSIE requires education settings to act immediately on safeguarding concerns. A complaint that contains safeguarding information is therefore not simply a customer-service matter. Staff receiving such a complaint must share the safeguarding element with the DSL/DDSL without delay, even where the complainant asks that it remain confidential.

- If a child is in immediate danger, staff will call 999.
- Where a concern may meet the harm threshold for an adult working with children, the Managing Director/case manager will follow KCSIE and consult or refer to the Doncaster LADO as required.
- Where the concern is about Lauren Meston, the matter will be referred to an uninvolved Director/Trustee and the LADO or other appropriate authority where the threshold may be met.
- Low-level adult concerns will be managed under the Low-Level Concerns Policy and recorded appropriately.
- Complaints about safeguarding systems or unsafe practice may also engage the Whistleblowing Policy.
- A complaints outcome will never override a safeguarding decision made to protect a child.

8. Equality, accessibility and reasonable adjustments

Future Pathways will make reasonable adjustments so that a person is not disadvantaged in accessing this process because of disability, SEND, literacy, communication need, language, trauma, mental-health need or another relevant factor. This may include accepting a complaint verbally, providing support to put concerns in writing, allowing an advocate, arranging an accessible meeting format, allowing additional time, or providing information in an alternative format.

Complaints involving discrimination, harassment, victimisation or prejudice-related behaviour will be considered alongside the Inclusion and Anti-Bullying policies and escalated as safeguarding concerns where appropriate.

9. Principles for handling complaints

- No person should investigate or determine a complaint in which they are directly involved.
- Decision-makers will approach complaints with an open mind and consider relevant evidence fairly.
- The procedure is not intended to be adversarial; informal resolution, clarification, apology, restorative action or practical remedy may be appropriate.
- Complainants will be told what can and cannot be considered and what outcome can realistically be provided.
- Staff will not promise absolute confidentiality where information must be shared for safeguarding, legal or fair-process reasons.
- A complaint being unsubstantiated does not mean it was malicious.
- Records will distinguish fact, allegation, opinion, decision and rationale.
- Where a timescale cannot be met, the complainant will be told why and given a revised date.

10. Time limit for raising a complaint

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of related incidents has occurred, within three months of the most recent incident. Future Pathways may accept an older complaint where there are exceptional circumstances, a safeguarding reason, the complainant could not reasonably have complained sooner, or it remains practical and fair to investigate.

Safeguarding information will always be considered regardless of when the underlying event occurred.

11. How to raise a concern or complaint

Concerns should normally be raised first with the member of staff most directly involved or with an appropriate manager. A formal complaint should be addressed to Lauren Meston, Managing Director, unless the complaint concerns Lauren personally.

A complaint about Lauren Meston should be addressed to an uninvolved Director/Trustee of Future Pathways. A complainant may ask a member of staff for help identifying the correct recipient.

Complaints may be submitted in writing or by email. Where accessibility requires it, Future Pathways will accept a complaint verbally and make an agreed written record of the concern.

12. Three-stage complaints procedure

Stage 1 – Informal resolution

Future Pathways encourages concerns to be resolved informally wherever this is appropriate and safe. The relevant member of staff or manager will listen to the concern, clarify the issues and desired outcome, make reasonable enquiries and seek a practical resolution.

- We aim to acknowledge an informal concern promptly and normally within 2 working days.
- We aim to provide a response or agreed next step within 10 working days.
- Possible outcomes include explanation, apology, corrective action, review of support, meeting, mediation/restorative work where appropriate, or confirmation that no further action is required.
- If the concern is not resolved, the complainant may request Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint and investigation

The complainant should set out the complaint, relevant facts and desired outcome as clearly as possible. The Managing Director, or another suitably senior and uninvolved person, will appoint an investigator where required.

- The formal complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 working days.
- The investigator may meet or speak with the complainant and relevant witnesses, review records and seek information from commissioning bodies or partner agencies where lawful and relevant.
- The person complained about will normally be given a fair opportunity to respond to relevant allegations, subject to safeguarding, police, LADO or confidentiality restrictions.
- The written outcome will normally be issued within 15 working days of acknowledgement. Complex cases may take longer; any extension will be explained.
- The outcome will identify the issues considered, the conclusion on each material issue, any appropriate action or remedy, and how to request Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Complaint review panel

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2, they may request a review panel. The request should normally be made within 10 working days of the Stage 2 outcome and explain why the complainant believes the complaint has not been resolved fairly or adequately.

The panel will normally consist of at least three people who have not previously been directly involved in the complaint. At least one panel member will be independent of the day-to-day management and running of Future Pathways. Where a different legal standard applies to Future Pathways' registration status, the panel will be constituted to meet that requirement.

- The panel is a review of the complaint and its handling; it is not a disciplinary hearing.
- The complainant may attend and may be accompanied by a supporter. Legal representation is not normally necessary, although reasonable requests will be considered.
- Relevant papers will be circulated in advance, subject to data-protection and safeguarding restrictions.
- The panel may uphold the complaint in whole or in part, reject it, recommend reconsideration, recommend procedural or service improvements, or identify another appropriate remedy.
- The panel will aim to meet within 20 working days of a valid Stage 3 request and provide its written findings and recommendations within 10 working days of the meeting.
- The Stage 3 outcome is the final stage of the Future Pathways internal complaints procedure.

13. Complaints about staff

Complaints about staff will be investigated fairly and confidentially. The complainant will be told the outcome of the complaint so far as appropriate, but Future Pathways will not disclose confidential employment, disciplinary or personal information about a member of staff.

If a complaint indicates a safeguarding allegation or low-level concern about an adult, the relevant safeguarding procedure will take precedence. The fact that a complaint is not upheld does not by itself mean that the complainant acted maliciously or that action should be taken against them.

14. Complaints about the Managing Director or Directors/Trustees

A complaint about Lauren Meston, Managing Director, will be handled by an uninvolved Director/Trustee or an independent person appointed for that purpose. Where the complaint may meet the KCSIE harm threshold, the LADO route will be followed without delay.

A complaint about a Director/Trustee will be handled by another uninvolved Director/Trustee. If impartial internal handling is not possible, Future Pathways will appoint an appropriately independent person or panel member.

15. Complaints involving commissioning schools or local authorities

Because Future Pathways provides alternative provision, a concern may involve decisions or duties held by a commissioning school or local authority as well as actions taken by Future Pathways. Examples include

attendance coding, SEND provision, EHC plan duties, statutory exclusion, placement decisions or transport arrangements.

Future Pathways will identify which organisation is responsible for each element, share relevant information lawfully and avoid requiring families to repeat their concern unnecessarily. Where a matter falls outside Future Pathways' authority, we will explain the appropriate external route and provide reasonable cooperation.

16. SEND and disability complaints

Complaints about support for SEND or disability will be considered under this procedure where they concern Future Pathways' own actions or provision. Where the matter concerns an EHC plan decision, statutory assessment, local-authority duty or another decision with a statutory appeal mechanism, the complainant will be directed to the relevant process. Safeguarding concerns within a SEND complaint will be escalated immediately.

17. Complaints from young people

Young people have the right to raise worries and complaints about their experience at Future Pathways. Staff will explain how to complain in an age-appropriate and accessible way and will not insist on a written form where this creates a barrier.

- A young person may speak to any trusted member of staff.
- They may ask for an advocate, parent/carer or other trusted adult to support them.
- Their wishes and feelings will be considered, but safeguarding information may need to be shared.
- The response will be explained in a way they can understand.
- No young person will be sanctioned simply for raising a genuine concern or complaint.

18. Anonymous complaints

Future Pathways will consider anonymous complaints where sufficient information is provided to make reasonable enquiries, particularly where safeguarding, safety, fraud or serious misconduct may be involved. Anonymous reporting can limit our ability to clarify issues or provide feedback, but it will not be dismissed solely because the complainant has not identified themselves.

19. Confidentiality and data protection

Complaint information will be shared only with those who need it to investigate, decide, safeguard, obtain advice or meet a legal obligation. Records will be handled in accordance with UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and Future Pathways' retention arrangements.

Panel findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and relevant decision-makers. Where inspection, commissioning or regulatory requirements apply, complaint records will be made available to authorised bodies as required. Information about disciplinary action against an individual will remain confidential unless there is a lawful reason to disclose it.

20. Recording complaints and organisational learning

Future Pathways will keep a written record of formal complaints and their outcomes, including whether they were resolved at the formal stage or proceeded to a panel. Records will include key evidence, decisions, actions and rationale.

The Managing Director will periodically review complaint themes, response times, safeguarding crossover, equality issues, repeat concerns and agreed actions. Learning will be used to improve policies, training, communication and service delivery. Governance assurance will focus on themes and effectiveness rather than unnecessary disclosure of personal information.

21. Persistent, serial or unreasonable complaint behaviour

Future Pathways will distinguish between a persistent complainant and unreasonably persistent behaviour. A person may pursue a complaint firmly or repeatedly and still be acting reasonably. We will not restrict access simply because a complaint is inconvenient, critical or has previously been unsuccessful.

Where a complaint has completed the procedure and substantially the same matter is repeatedly raised without significant new evidence, or where communications become abusive, threatening, discriminatory or unreasonably excessive, Future Pathways may set proportionate communication arrangements. Any restriction will be time-limited, recorded, reviewed and will not prevent new safeguarding concerns or genuinely new complaints from being considered.

22. Complaints involving abusive or threatening conduct

Future Pathways expects communication to remain respectful. Threats, harassment, discriminatory abuse or violence towards staff, young people or others will not be accepted. Appropriate protective action may be taken, including ending a meeting, requiring written communication, involving police or applying site-access controls where necessary. Such action will not remove the organisation's duty to consider the underlying complaint fairly.

23. External escalation

After the Future Pathways internal process has been completed, the external route depends on the legal and commissioning status of the matter. A complainant may, where relevant, be able to approach the commissioning school, local authority, Department for Education, Ofsted or another regulator/ombudsman. Future Pathways will explain the most appropriate route in the final response where one is available.

The Department for Education generally expects a school's own complaints procedure to be completed before it considers a complaint about how the school handled the process. DfE does not normally re-investigate the underlying complaint or substitute its decision for that of the school; its role is principally to consider whether the process complied with applicable requirements.

Safeguarding exception

A person does not need to complete this complaints procedure before contacting police, children's social care, the LADO or another safeguarding authority where a child may be at risk. Immediate safeguarding concerns should never wait for Stage 1, 2 or 3.

24. Complaints monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner following significant safeguarding learning, changes in law or DfE guidance, a material change in Future Pathways' registration/commissioning arrangements, or evidence that the procedure is not operating fairly or effectively.

25. Related Future Pathways policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Low-Level Concerns Policy;
- Whistleblowing Policy;
- Staff Code of Conduct;
- Anti-Bullying Policy;
- Inclusion Policy;
- SEND Policy;
- Behaviour Policy;
- Attendance Policy;
- Children in Care Policy;
- Online Safety and Mobile Phone Policy;
- Health & Safety Policy;
- Use of Reasonable Force Policy;
- Data Protection / Privacy arrangements;
- Staff grievance and disciplinary procedures.

Appendix 1 – Complaint form

Name of complainant:

Relationship to young person / organisation:

Young person's name (if relevant):

Preferred contact details:

What happened? Please include dates, people involved and relevant context:

What have you already done to try to resolve the matter?

What outcome would you like Future Pathways to consider?

Is there anything we should know to make this process accessible for you?

Are you raising an immediate safeguarding concern? Yes / No

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2 – Staff quick guide when receiving a complaint

1. Listen calmly and clarify what the person is concerned about.
2. Check immediately whether the information suggests a child may be at risk or an adult may have behaved unsafely. If yes, contact the DSL/DDSL without delay.
3. Do not promise secrecy or a particular outcome.
4. Try to resolve straightforward concerns informally where appropriate.
5. Record significant concerns and agreed actions accurately.
6. If the person wants to make a formal complaint, explain Stage 2 and help with accessibility where needed.
7. Do not investigate an allegation against a member of staff yourself if safeguarding/LADO procedures may apply.
8. Treat the complainant respectfully and avoid defensive or adversarial language.
9. Keep complaint information confidential and share only on a need-to-know basis.
10. Escalate any conflict of interest so an uninvolved person can handle the matter.

Appendix 3 – Complaint investigation checklist

- Complaint acknowledged and scope clarified
- Safeguarding/LADO/low-level concern/whistleblowing crossover considered
- Conflict of interest checked
- Reasonable adjustments agreed where required
- Relevant policies and commissioning responsibilities identified
- Complainant's desired outcome recorded
- Relevant records/evidence obtained lawfully
- People named in complaint given fair opportunity to respond where appropriate
- Facts distinguished from opinions and disputed accounts
- Decision made on balance of available evidence
- Outcome addresses each material point
- Actions/remedies allocated and tracked
- Stage 3 rights explained where applicable
- Learning themes recorded without unnecessary personal information

Approval

This policy is approved by Future Pathways CIC and will be made available to young people, parents/carers, staff, commissioning organisations and other relevant stakeholders. It will be reviewed at least annually.

Signed: *L. Meston*

Lauren Meston – Managing Director and DSL

Date: 20/08/2026

Next review due: 19/08/2027