



**LIGHTHOUSE**  
FUTURES TRUST

# **Complaints Policy and Procedures**

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# **LIGHTHOUSE FUTURES TRUST**

## **Complaints and Procedures Policy**

*Lighthouse Futures Trust may be referred to in full or as LFT or the charity.*

### **1. Introduction and Objectives**

- 1.1 LFT is keen to ensure that all customers and stakeholders have a positive experience when engaging with the charity. In order to ensure we listen to their views, the charity has a complaints policy which provides a framework in which people can raise a complaint or concern.
- 1.2 The objects of this policy are to set out the procedures for responding to complaints made against the charity.
- 1.3 This policy applies to complaints made by:
  - Parents/carers of students currently or recently (within three months) on placement with the charity
  - Individuals who either have 'parental responsibility' for a student or who care for them, but are not the student's parents
  - Students aged 18 years or over
  - Third parties concerned about action (or lack of action) taken by the charity
  - Partners or stake-holders including employer hosts, funders.
  - Other customers of the charity who purchase goods/services.

### **2 Control**

- 2.1 This Policy is controlled by the Board of Trustees of the charity who reserve the right to alter its provisions. It will be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 2.2 Dealing with complaints on a day-to-day basis are delegated to the CEO.

### **3 Principles**

- 3.1 All concerns should be treated seriously. The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The charity will address informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage in order to reduce the need for lengthy and time-consuming formal procedures.
- 3.2 The formal procedures will be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further. Formal complaints should be made in writing using the Charity's Complaints Form at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 This procedure is not intended to cover those matters for which there is a specific statutory process to object, complain or appeal, for example safeguarding, staff discipline.

- 3.4 The charity aims to consider and resolve all complaints as quickly, and efficiently as possible so time limits have been set for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set. The charity will keep the person who raised the complaint informed of progress and provide an explanation for any delay.
- 3.5 Formal complaints should be lodged as soon as possible but no later than 3 months after the incident or issue has occurred. The charity may consider exceptions to this rule for example if the matter relates to child protection or safe-guarding.

#### **4 Recording and Analysing Complaints**

- 4.1 A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. An example of a complaint form can be found in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The charity will record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. At the end of meetings or telephone calls the member of staff should ensure that the complainant and the charity have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.
- 4.3 The Trustees will monitor the level and nature of complaints, and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure, making changes where necessary.

#### **5 The Complaints Procedure**

##### **5.1 Informal Stage**

- Many concerns can be dealt with informally. The first point of contact should be the Manager in charge of the service/activity. The complainant should be asked to make arrangements to meet the Manager in person, speak on the phone or send something in writing, as soon as possible after any incident/cause for concern raises.
- The Manager dealing with the issue should make a brief note of the concerns and an indication of the outcome of the discussion including any agreed actions.
- It may be necessary for the Manager to take advice (internally or externally) before responding to a concern. If so, the charity will endeavour to provide an update on the progress of their enquiries as quickly as possible.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied following this informal approach, they may raise a formal complaint.

##### **5.2 Formal Stage**

- Where a person has not been able to resolve a concern informally, they are entitled to progress to the formal stage.
- Formal complaints should be lodged as soon as possible but no later than 3 months after the incident or issue has occurred. (The charity may consider exceptions to this rule for example if the matter relates to child protection or safe-guarding).

- Formal complaints should, where possible, be put in writing to the CEO, using the Complaints Form (Appendix 1). The form should include details of the complaint, action already taken to resolve it and actions that may help to resolve the problem. If the complaint concerns the CEO, it should be sent to the Chair of Trustees. If the complaint is about the Chair of Trustees, it should be made in writing to the Vice-Chair of Trustees. The charity will acknowledge the complaint in writing within 3 working days of receiving it.
- The CEO will appoint an Investigating Officer to investigate the complaint which may be themselves, another appropriate staff member, trustee, HR representative or independent person. If the complaint is regarding the CEO, the Chair of Trustees will appoint an Investigating Officer. If the complaint is about the Chair of Trustees, the Vice Chair of Trustees will appoint an Investigating Officer. In all instances, the Investigating Office should not have had any prior involvement with the case.
- The Investigating Officer should contact the complainant to clarify the details of the complaint as necessary. Complainants will be allowed the opportunity to meet with the Investigating Officer. If they wish, they may ask someone (not acting in a legal capacity) to accompany them at the meeting for support and to help them to explain the reasons for their complaint. It is preferable to involve someone in whom they have confidence but who is not directly connected with the charity.
- The Investigating Officer will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved.
- If the complaint involves a student, their parent/carer should be contacted and, if interviewed, ideally a parent/carer should be present. In some cases, this might not be possible and a member of staff with whom the student feels comfortable should attend the interview (such as a Job Coach). Parents should be told if their child is to be interviewed.
- Confidentiality is important in securing the confidence of all concerned. Conversations and correspondence must be treated with discretion. However, the parties to a complaint should be aware that some information may have to be shared in order to carry out a thorough investigation.
- Once the Investigating Officer has established all the relevant facts, they will provide a written response to the complaint. This will give an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, the charity will indicate, where appropriate, what they are proposing to do. The complainant may be invited to a meeting to discuss the outcome.
- The charity will aim to respond to formal complaints within 15 working days. If this is not possible the Charity will write to the complainant to ensure they are kept informed of their progress in addressing their complaint.
- The decision at this stage will usually be final; however, if the complainant is dissatisfied with the way in which their complaint was investigated at Stage 1 they may proceed to Stage 2.

### 5.3 Formal Stage 2 – consideration by an Appeal Panel

- If the complainant has already been through Stage 1 and is unhappy with the way in which it has been handled, they may take it to Formal Stage 2. This comprises a hearing before a Trustees Appeal Panel. This is a formal process and the ultimate recourse at charity level.
- An appeal to Formal Stage 2 must be made to the Chair of Trustees within 10 working days of the receipt of the outcome of Stage 1 of the procedure.

- The charity will aim to convene the appeal hearing within a further 20 working days. The complainant, the Investigating Officer, the Trustees and any other relevant parties will be informed of the date, time and venue of the appeal hearing. Any documentation relating to the hearing will be sent to the parties 5 working days in advance of the hearing.
- The purpose of the appeal hearing is to give the complainant the chance to present their concerns with regards to whether the investigation has been conducted fairly and the correct procedures followed. This will be done before a panel of trustees who will have no prior knowledge of the details of the case and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice. The panel will consist of two persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
- The complainant may ask someone (not acting in a legal capacity) to accompany them to the meeting for support and to help them to explain the reasons for their complaint. The choice of person is the complainants own but it is preferable to involve someone in whom they have confidence but who is not directly connected with the charity.
- The aim of a Panel is not to rehear the complaint: they will not go through the case again. Their role is to review the way in which the complaint has been investigated and to determine whether this has been done fairly and that the correct procedure has been followed. It will also make appropriate recommendations. They will hear the report of the Investigating Officer at Stage 1 and any submissions on that report by the complainant. The review should not entail a rehearing of the case.
- The Panel may:
  - ❖ dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
  - ❖ uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
  - ❖ decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
  - ❖ recommend changes to the charity's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur
- A decision will be made within 3 working days. This will be communicated in writing. The decision of the panel is final.

#### 5.4 Closure of Complaints

- Very occasionally, the charity may feel that, regretfully, they need to close a complaint despite the complainant remaining dissatisfied. The charity will do all they can to help to resolve a complaint but it may simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it may be a case of 'agreeing to disagree'.
- Persistent representations can detract from key responsibilities in the charity. For this reason, the charity reserves the right to close a complaint and cease correspondence where all reasonable action has been taken to resolve the complaint and the official process has been exhausted.
- If the complainant continues to make representations to the charity or attempts to re-open the same issue, then the correspondence may be recognised as vexatious and the Chair of Trustees will inform them in writing, that the procedures have all been followed and that all reasonable action has been taken to try to resolve the issue and that the matter is now closed. There will be no obligation on the part of the charity to engage in any further correspondence.

# Appendix 1 – Charity Complaint Form



<p><b>Your name:</b></p>
<p><b>Student's name (if relevant):</b></p>
<p><b>Your relationship to the student (if relevant):</b></p>
<p><b>Address:</b></p>  <p><b>Postcode:</b> <b>Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:</b></p>
<p><b>Please give details of your complaint.</b></p>
<p><b>What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response)?</b></p>

**What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?**

**Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.**

**Signature: Date:**

**Official use**

**Date acknowledgement sent:**

**By who:**

**Complaint referred to:**

**Date:**

# Appendix 2 – Format of Meetings

## Initial Investigation

The Investigating Officer should:

1. Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved.
2. Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
3. Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or if further information is necessary).
4. Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
5. Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
6. Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
7. Keep notes of the interview or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting.

## Appeals Hearing Procedure

1. Introductions are made.
2. The complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
3. The CEO/Investigating Officer may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
4. The CEO/Investigating Officer will then explain the charity's actions, this may be followed by the charity's witnesses.
5. The complainant may question both the CEO/Investigating Officer and the witnesses after each has spoken.
6. The Panel members may ask questions at any point.
7. The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
8. The CEO/Investigating Officer is then invited to sum up the charity's actions and response to the complaint.
9. Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
10. The parties will reconvene for the Panel's decision to be made. If it is not possible to reach a decision that day a decision will be made within 3 working days.
11. The decision will be confirmed in writing to the complainant within 3 working days.
12. The hearing should not be unnecessarily formalised.
13. The complainant may be accompanied at the hearing them at the meeting (not acting in a legal capacity). The CEO/Investigating Officer may also be accompanied by a suitable person.
14. Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.