

# Complaints Policy and Procedures

**File Reference Number: DI - HR11**

**Approved by Depaul International Board of Trustees: October 2024**

**Lead responsibility for this Policy and Procedure is:**

Depaul International Director of International Programmes

<b>1. Complaints Policy Statement</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Application and Scope</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Roles and Responsibilities</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Exemptions to this policy</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>5. Procedures</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>5.1. How to make a complaint</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>5.2. Making a complaint via an advocate</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>5.3. How we will handle a complaint</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>5.4. Complaints Process (formal complaints)</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>5.5. Informal complaints</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>5.6. Procedures for Malicious, Vexatious, Offensive and         Discriminatory Complaints</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>6. Monitoring and Review</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>7. Continuous Renewal Clause</b> .....	<b>9</b>

## **1. Complaints Policy Statement**

At Depaul International, upholding our values and high standards of conduct is integral to our work. We however recognise that sometimes our standards and commitments might not be upheld to the standard we expect, and issues may arise that result in dissatisfaction among our supporters, partners and people with whom we work, or other stakeholders. If this is the case, we want to be informed.

Depaul International is committed to ensuring accessible feedback mechanisms are in place and are promoted, so that we have the opportunity to address any issues that arise, try and put things right and improve our quality and effectiveness. Our Complaints Policy and Procedures are an essential part of putting this commitment into practice.

For the purpose of this policy, a **complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction** and lets us know when our stakeholders are unhappy. A complaint requires further investigation and a response, making it distinct from other types of feedback. Making a complaint gives us the opportunity to put things right and make changes when it is found we have not met our expected standards.

All Depaul International staff are inducted in this Complaints Policy and provided with complaints handling training as required.

This Policy and Procedures ensures a quality approach; helping us gain stakeholder insight which we will monitor and use to improve our work. The underlying basis of this Policy Statement is Depaul International's commitment to equalities, fair access and inclusion.

### **Our Approach to Complaints**

We have adopted the UK Housing Ombudsman's Principles for Dispute Resolution as a good practice guide in handling Complaints. The Housing Ombudsman identified three principles behind effective dispute resolution:

#### **I. Being fair – treating people fairly and following fair processes through:**

- providing a constructive approach which applies consistent principles to all complaints received, whilst ensuring each complaint is considered on its own facts; and
- treating each complaint justly and without favour or discrimination.

#### **II. Putting things right**

- Our commitment is to being open to learning from our mistakes and putting any identified problem right as soon as possible.

#### **III. Learning from outcomes**

- We will demonstrate our willingness to learn from the issues raised and/or identify where we have not upheld our expected standards or have made a mistake. We will provide feedback to relevant parties including the complainant on lessons learnt and actions taken to our work.

Depaul International will manage complaints in a manner that prioritises the safety of the complainant and those affected at all stages. In line with our Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy we will ensure information related to the complaint is only shared on a need-to-know basis among those directly handling or overseeing the complaint.

## **2. Application and Scope**

2.1 This Complaints Policy and Procedures provides principles and processes to be followed by all  
Depaul

International employees, volunteers and Trustees, hereafter referred to as staff, to handle all complaints received from Depaul International stakeholders and members of the public.

2.2 This policy only applies to complaints. Depaul International welcomes and values other types of feedback (for example compliments, comments, suggestions, and concerns) but this policy focuses on guidance for managing expressions of dissatisfaction that require further investigation and a considered response.

2.3 Depaul International welcomes complaints from any individuals, group of individuals, or organisations who want to complain about Depaul International's staff or activities (besides the exceptions listed in 2.4). We also welcome complaints from individuals on behalf of another person, if they have been asked to do so for reasons such as a fear of repercussions, safety concerns or language barriers. This person is known as their advocate. We also accept anonymous complaints, however it will only be possible to pursue cases if enough information is provided. It may not be possible to provide updates for anonymous complaints.

2.4 We will not accept complaints under this policy from:

- Employees - they should instead refer their concerns to their Line Manager and use Depaul International's policies for Grievance (Dispute Resolution) and Disciplinary.
- Contractors and commissioning partners - they should instead refer to the processes contained in the agreement or contract and liaise with the relevant contract manager.

#### Complaints regarding Depaul Subsidiary Charities

Depaul Subsidiary Charities are required to have their own Complaints Policies in place to ensure that the people who access their services and their other stakeholders have fair and accessible ways of making complaints. Complaints regarding the activities or staff of Depaul Subsidiary Charities should be made according to the relevant subsidiary policy and procedure, which can be accessed via the subsidiaries' website or their offices.

### **3. Roles and Responsibilities**

3.1 Formal complaints can only be received, logged, investigated and resolved by employees of Depaul International.

3.2 The Depaul International Director of International Programmes is responsible for this policy and for ensuring relevant staff are trained to handle complaints effectively.

3.3 All employees must respond to complaints sensitively and fairly, and engage with complaint handling training if required.

3.4 Employees may be appointed to investigate and resolve complaints by a member of the Senior Leadership Team. This is referred to as the 'investigating officer'. Investigating officers will have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints, have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.

3.5 No employee can investigate a complaint made against them. Employees that receive a complaint in which they are mentioned must immediately pass the complaint to the appropriate line manager and must not participate in any investigatory or advocacy role associated with that complaint.

3.6 Any employee that is the subject of a complaint must cooperate fully and promptly in any investigation. Unreasonable failure to assist in an investigation may lead to disciplinary action being taken under Depaul International's Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

3.7 Trustees are ultimately responsible for reviewing and approving this policy to ensure Depaul International complies with best practice in collecting, handling and reporting on complaints.

#### **4. Exemptions to this policy**

There are some issues that will not be dealt with as a complaint. We will always communicate this with the person raising the issue and offer an alternative course of action. These issues include but are not limited to:

- In cases where a complaint concerns a Safeguarding matter, we will follow the Procedures as detailed in Depaul International's Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk Policy and liaise with the Depaul International Designated Safeguarding Officer, whether or not the complainant wishes to make their concerns formal.
- Where a complaint relates directly or indirectly to open or existing legal proceedings being taken by a complainant against Depaul International. In such instances the complaint will be referred to Depaul International's Group Director of Finance and Resources and addressed as part of the legal proceedings.
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago.

## **5. Procedures**

### **5.1 How to make a complaint**

There are several ways to make a complaint to Depaul International:

- Via email: [complaints@depaulinternational.org](mailto:complaints@depaulinternational.org)
- Via telephone: +44 (0)20 3948 9872
- By contacting a Depaul International staff member directly, verbally or in writing.

### **5.2 Making a complaint via an advocate**

5.2.1 Stakeholders wishing to complain may decide to ask someone to help them make their complaint. This person is known as their advocate. An advocate may be a parent, friend, partner, relative, a staff member of Depaul International. Their role may include helping a complainant to write or formulate their complaint, or providing more general support in order to resolve their concerns.

5.2.2 An advocate must have a complainant's written permission to make a complaint on their behalf and discuss their complaint with Depaul International, we must receive a copy of this before we can discuss any complaint with an advocate. Due to confidentiality and Data Protection requirements we cannot comment upon complaints submitted on someone's behalf until we have obtained the written consent of the individual on whose behalf they are acting. If such consent cannot be obtained we will write and explain this.

### **5.3 How we will handle a complaint**

5.3.1 We will take all complaints received seriously and aim to resolve them as swiftly as possible.

5.3.2 The word 'complaint' does not have to be used. However, we will distinguish between a Feedback and a Formal Complaint.

5.3.3 We will promote and encourage opportunities to complain and accept complaints in person, by phone, by email, by letter or via an advocate (see 5.2).

5.3.4 Any complaints or expressions of dissatisfaction received via Depaul International Social Media will be responded to by the Head of Communications and handled confidentially, where possible by direct message on the platform it is made, or by signposting the complainant to our website.

5.3.5 In the first instance all complaints will be dealt with as a Stage 1 complaint.

5.3.6 We will refer complaints received about a specific Depaul International Department to the relevant member of the Senior Leadership Team for investigation.

5.3.7 We will treat all complainants respectfully during and after an investigation into their complaint, the principles of the Equalities Act 2010 will apply to protect against direct and indirect discrimination, harassment or victimisation in services and public functions, people who have, who are perceived to have, or are associated with someone who has protected characteristic.

5.3.8 We will keep details of complaints confidential and only share them when required in accordance with the law.

5.3.9 We may take disciplinary action against an employee, or start action under other procedures, for example, legal procedures or Safeguarding as a result of complaints made through this policy and procedures.

5.3.10 If we receive an anonymous complaint we will record and investigate it as far as that is possible.

5.3.11 We will signpost stakeholders to make a complaint if they are dissatisfied with an area of our work.

### **5.4 Complaints Process (formal complaints)**

There are two stages to our formal complaint process:

#### **5.4.1 Stage One**

Any formal complaint received must be dealt with at Stage 1 in the first instance.

All complaints will be assigned to an investigating officer, who may be any employee of Depaul International.

They will listen to the complainants concerns; offer support and investigate their feedback.

On receiving a formal complaint, we will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within **3 working days** and provide the contact details of the investigating officer and the case reference number.
- Contact the complainant to confirm our understanding of the complaint and to find out what resolution they are seeking.
- Provide a full response in writing to the complainant within **10 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged. We may agree an alternative timescale with you in exceptional circumstances, but this will not exceed 20 working days in total. We will agree with you suitable intervals to keep you informed. Where agreement over an extended timescale cannot be reached, we will provide the details of a Regulator or external body where appropriate so the complainant can challenge our proposed plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of our response.
- We recognise that complaints can be resolved in several different ways. When responding to complaints we will offer a solution that takes into consideration any organisational failure and the overall circumstances of the complaint.
- Examples of solutions we may offer are:
  - Acknowledging when we have got it wrong
  - Offering an apology
  - Providing an explanation, assistance or reason
  - Taking action to resolve the issue
  - Reconsidering or changing a decision
  - Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;
  - Making changes or improvements to our activities, policies, or procedures

#### **5.4.2 Stage Two**

If a complainant is not satisfied with our response at Stage 1, they should contact us within 20 working days to ask us to escalate to Stage 2. If we do not hear from the complainant then we will close the complaint case.

Requests to escalate a complaint should explain why they are dissatisfied and what they consider has not been resolved. We will ask complainants to tell us what they expect from the resolution.

If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the complainants satisfaction at stage 1, it must be escalated to Stage 2.

Our Stage 2 process is an internal review. The review will check that the decisions at Stage 1 were fair, reasonable and in accordance with our policies. It is unlikely that we will change the judgement in decision making where the decision was reasonable at Stage 1.

Sometimes it might not be appropriate to escalate a complaint to Stage 2. We will always set out why we think the complaint response is final and if signpost complainants where escalation is available through Regulators and external bodies.

Stage 2 complaints will be assigned to a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Group CEO, who will listen to the complainants concerns; offer them support and investigate the matter raised by them. This will not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1

On receiving a stage 2 complaint, we will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within **5 working days** of the request to escalate and provide the contact details of the investigating officer and the case reference number.
- Contact the complainant to confirm our understanding of the complaint and to further discuss what resolution they are seeking.
- We will provide a full response within **20 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged. We may agree an alternative timescale with complainants in exceptional circumstances, but this will not exceed 40 working days in total. We will agree with you suitable intervals to keep you informed. Where agreement over an extended timescale cannot be reached, we will provide the details of a Regulator or external body where appropriate so the complainant can challenge our proposed plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of our response.
- Before we issue our final response, we will share the proposed outcome in relation to the Internal Review and give the complainant an opportunity to respond to the findings before formally issuing our response. We will always aim to reduce our response times.

#### 5.4.3 If a complainant is not satisfied

After Stage 2 there is no further internal process and we will close the complaint case.

Depaul International staff should be open, transparent and supportive in advising complainants of their right to escalate their complaint further or access support by assisting complainants to identify where to go in order to progress their complaint externally.

This may include providing information or access to information, such as the use of a computer, signposting to the nearest library, ICT facilities or an external agency, or helping the complainant to identify a suitable advocate.

Donor or supporter complaints may be referred to the Fundraising Regulator

<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/complaints>

Personal data use complaints may be referred to the Information Commissioner's Office

<https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

General consumer advice is available from Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/>

Individuals may also contact our UK Regulator, The Charity Commission, following the procedures on their website [www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity](http://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity)

#### 5.5 Informal complaints

If a complainant prefers a situation to be managed informally, we will take a flexible approach wherever possible. We also encourage stakeholders to discuss concerns with a member of staff before making a formal complaint. At this point we will look into the matters that are being raised and try to resolve them before starting the formal process. We want the opportunity to put things right as soon as possible.

In these scenarios we will make a professional judgement based on the information shared and, as far as possible, with the involvement of the person sharing the information. Any type of feedback that suggests



a serious breach of our code of conduct by our staff or a safeguarding concern, would have to be fully investigated, respecting confidentiality and the safety of any individuals concerned.

### **5.6 Procedures for Malicious, Vexatious, Offensive and Discriminatory Complaints**

Depaul International expects all complainants to act in good faith and to raise issues of concern that are both genuine and can be substantiated. If at any time a member of staff feels that a complaint is malicious, vexatious, persistent or inappropriate they will immediately escalate the complaint to a member of the Senior Leadership Team of Depaul International.

A complaint may be considered offensive if it includes inappropriate language or views which discriminate against anyone. If an offensive complaint is received, it will be logged in the same way as any other complaint and then immediately forwarded to a member of the Senior Leadership Team of Depaul International.

The Senior Leadership Team will review the complaint and may discuss complaints with Human Resources. They will decide if the complaint should be closed for purposes of offensiveness, discrimination or inappropriateness. Complaints decided to be closed on these grounds must be approved by two members of the Senior Leadership Team. Such complaints will be marked as confidential and will be archived.

A member of the Senior Leadership Team of Depaul International will inform the complainant in writing of the decision, within 10 working days of the complaint being received (according to the original date it was logged as being received).

Depaul International may liaise with legal advisors regarding complaints that appear to be of such an offensive nature that they may need to be referred to the police.

## **6. Monitoring and Review**

The Senior Leadership Team will review the number of complaints received, the nature of complaints received and complaint satisfaction annually, in order to review Policies and Procedures and staff training needs in relation to complaint handling. This will be reported to the Depaul International Board.

## **7. Continuous Improvement Renewal Clause**

This Policy and Procedures will be reviewed every three years from the date of issue to determine its continued relevance, effectiveness and appropriateness. This Policy and Procedures may be assessed before that time as necessary to reflect substantial organisational changes, following an inspection, review or validation visit, or as recommended by auditors, changes required by law, or changes required by Depaul International Governance structures.