
Complaints Policy

Psychiatry UK policies can only be considered to be valid and up-to-date if viewed in the Policy Library on the intranet. Please visit the Policy Library for the latest version.

Purpose of Document	To ensure that all complaints are treated seriously, handled consistently, fairly and promptly, and that we learn from them.
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Executive Sponsor (Job Title)	Director of Quality and Safety
Policy Owner (Job Title)	Associate Director of Clinical Governance
Intranet Location	1. Clinical and Patient Policies

Summary of Policy

This policy outlines the commitment of Psychiatry UK to provide a fair, transparent, and effective process for managing all complaints received from a patient, their representatives, or other stakeholders.

We are dedicated to resolving concerns promptly, learning from complaints and taking appropriate action to resolve complaints in a timely manner.

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Version Control and Review Log

Version No.	Review Date	Name of Reviewer	Approval Process	Summary of Amendments and Rationale for Changes
4.0	October 2025	N.A.	Initial version approved by Quality & Safety Committee	N.A. Full rewrite of this policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure that all complaints are treated seriously and handled consistently, fairly and promptly.
- Provide a clear and accessible pathway for individuals to raise concerns about any aspect of the service.
- Promote a culture of openness and transparency regarding feedback and complaints.
- Facilitate learning from complaints to identify areas for improvement in service delivery, clinical practice, and administrative processes.
- We expect colleagues to seek feedback from people in our service and stakeholders to understand their opinions, questions, worries and perspectives on care, the service or wider issues. This can include positive, negative and/or neutral information that helps to support people in our service.
- Comply with relevant UK legislation, including the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014, Data Protection Act 2018 (GDPR), Equality Act 2010, and best practice guidance from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and other professional bodies.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All employees
- All contractors engaged by Psychiatry UK to provide services
- All aspects of the service provided by Psychiatry UK including and not limited to:
 - Remote consultation, assessment, diagnosis, and treatment.
 - Prescribing and medication management.
 - Information provision and communication.
 - Administrative processes and appointment scheduling.
 - The conduct of employees and contractors.
 - Any other service-related issues that may give rise to a complaint.
- This policy covers complaints made by patients, their legal representatives, family members (where appropriate consent is given or in the best interest of the service user), or other relevant third parties.

Definitions

- **Complaint:** Any expression of dissatisfaction, whether written, email or oral, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. The complaint may be about the provision of care, treatment, or services or about the conduct of an individual working for Psychiatry UK on an employed or contractor basis. It includes but is not limited to any dissatisfaction with a diagnosis, treatment plan, medication, communication, access to services, or the overall experience.
- **Concern:** A concern is an issue that can be raised in a number of ways, however unlike a complaint these may not need to be investigated but should be resolved through local resolution and within two working days. Concerns have the potential to escalate to formal complaints, however dealing with these effectively and quickly can reduce the likelihood of this happening. Responding to concerns through local resolution is more informal than a complaint, and can be done verbally or via email, but the preference of the person raising the concern and the outcome that they expect should be taken into account.
- **Compliment:** A compliment is an expression of praise towards one or more people and can be in relation to the services provided. It's important to record compliments so that we can identify where we are making good progress and excelling either generally or in specific areas. We can then understand more about this good practice and share this learning with other departments.
- **Complainant:** The individual making the complaint. This may be the service user themselves, or a person acting on their behalf (e.g., a relative, advocate, or legal representative).
- **Investigation:** The process of gathering all relevant facts, evidence, and perspectives related to a complaint to determine its validity and identify any necessary actions.
- **Resolution:** The outcome of the complaint process, which may include an explanation, an apology, remedial action, a change in practice, or a combination thereof.
- **Early resolution written response:** A written email/letter to the complainant outlining the agreed early resolution of a concern.
- **Formal response:** A written report from the complaints team detailing the investigation into the formal complaint, which includes outcomes and lessons learned.
- **Working Day:** Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays.

Principles of Complaint Handling

Psychiatry UK is committed to the following principles when handling complaints:

- **Accessibility:** Ensuring the complaints process is easy to understand and access for all individuals, including those with communication needs or disabilities.
- **Fairness and Impartiality:** Treating all complaints objectively, without prejudice, and ensuring a balanced consideration of all evidence.
- **Transparency:** Clearly communicating the complaints process, progress, and outcomes to the complainant.
- **Promptness:** Handling complaints efficiently and within defined timescales, providing updates where delays occur.
- **Confidentiality:** Protecting the privacy of all parties involved, adhering strictly to data protection regulations (GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018). Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.
- **User-Centred Approach:** Focusing on the complainant's perspective, actively listening to their concerns, and striving for a resolution that addresses their dissatisfaction.
- **Learning and Improvement:** Using complaints as valuable feedback to identify systemic issues, improve service quality, and prevent recurrence of similar problems.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for actions and decisions and providing appropriate remedies where errors or shortcomings are identified.

Confidentiality of Complaints

- Maintain confidentiality and protect privacy throughout the complaints process in accordance with UK General Protection Data Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.
- Only collect and disclose information to those staff and contractors who work for, or on behalf of, Psychiatry UK or staff or contractors that are involved in the consideration of the complaint. Documents relating to a complaint investigation are securely stored and kept separately from medical records or other patient records. They are only accessible to staff involved in the consideration of the complaint.
- Complaint outcomes can be anonymised and shared within our organisation as applicable.

Process and Timescales

Early resolution

In most cases, people raising a complaint will want our service to work proactively, be accountable and take action. To support this, colleagues must feel able to quickly and effectively resolve the issue that has been raised if it is possible to do so. If a solution can be offered within two working days, then the 'early resolution' process should be applied, as detailed in the associated standard operating procedure. (*currently under development*)

In line with our values, staff and contractors or individuals must always offer an immediate explanation to the person and apologise that they have needed to raise a concern.

If a complaint is made verbally and is resolved within two working days by the staff and contractors or individuals who received the complaint or any others person, then the staff and contractors or individuals must confirm with the complainant that they are satisfied the issue has been resolved. If they agree, then we do not need to follow the formal complaint route.

Staff and contractors or individuals must make sure complaints that have been resolved through early resolution are still recorded including brief details of action taken and lessons learned on the Portal and RADAR. A copy of the completed form may be provided to the patient if requested.

Some complaints, verbal or written, will be viewed as more serious or complex and it will not be possible, or appropriate, to address and resolve these through the early resolution process. In these situations, those working for, or on behalf of, Psychiatry UK should ensure the complainant is supported in understanding that a formal investigation will be arranged by the complaints team and be given a single point of contact for any additional information they need while this is being coordinated (this should be the appointed investigator if known).

Formal investigation

In circumstances where early resolution is not possible or appropriate (serious or complex issues), the complainant has requested an investigation or the complaint is from an MP or Officer of the Crown, then a formal investigation will be required.

As soon as possible, a review by the complaint officer should be completed to ensure the matter can be dealt with as a complaint. This will include consideration of the timeframes, if the person is able to complain (if not the person themselves) and if it appears a complaint is the correct procedure to follow.

Full details of the complaint must be recorded on RADAR and a note made of the system generated Complaint Reference Number.

The complaints manager is responsible for delegating each complaint to a complaint officer and monitoring progress.

A written acknowledgement must be sent out within three working days.

A formal complaint must be responded to in writing, within 30 working days.

Timescales for raising concerns or making a complaint

In most cases, the concern or complaint will need to be made within 12 months of the date of the event or issue occurring, or the date when the person complaining found out about it (whichever is later). We do not automatically refuse to consider any issue that is 'out of time' and each must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Exceptional circumstances - In some cases, there may be a very good reason for not making the complaint before the deadline and we need to consider if it is still possible to respond to the complaint. This may be due to the person's individual circumstances e.g. they were too

unwell and didn't feel able to raise within timeframes. If this applies, then the complaints manager will need to carefully consider the reasons and if they feel able to agree to accept the complaint. If needed, further advice should be requested from the associate director of clinical governance.

Supporting SOPs and Related Policies

- ***This is in development and shall be updated in due course***

Roles and Responsibilities

All employees and contractors

- To be aware of this complaints policy and the complaints procedure.
- To treat all expressions of dissatisfaction seriously and with empathy.
- To log all complaints within the RADAR system for review.
- To attempt to resolve minor concerns informally and promptly where appropriate and possible, at the first point of contact.
- To immediately escalate any formal complaint or unresolved concern to the complaints manager.
- To cooperate fully with any complaint investigation, providing accurate and timely information as requested.

Complaints investigator

- To be the primary point of liaison for all formal complaints as needed and as allocated by the complaints manager.
- To acknowledge receipt of complaints within the specified period as detailed in the standard operating procedure.
- To liaise with relevant clinicians and administrative staff to gather necessary information and evidence.
- To ensure compliance with all relevant legislation and CQC requirements throughout the complaints process.
- To maintain accurate and confidential records of all complaints.

Complaints manager

- To manage and oversee the entire complaint investigation process, ensuring it is thorough, fair, and timely.
- To identify any trends and themes from complaints and report these to senior management and clinical leads for service improvement.
- To ensure staff involved in complaints are supported and receive appropriate feedback.

- To sign off any formal responses to complainants, ensuring they are comprehensive, empathetic, and address all points raised.

Clinical employees and contractors

- To provide expert clinical input and advice during complaint investigations relating to clinical care, diagnosis, treatment, or prescribing.
- To review relevant clinical records and provide explanations of clinical decisions where required.
- To participate in meetings or discussions related to complaints, as necessary.
- To engage in reflective practice following complaints to enhance their professional development and personal clinical practice.

Registered manager / nominated individual

- To have overall accountability for the effective implementation and adherence to this policy.
- To ensure that adequate resources are allocated for effective complaint handling.
- To review complaint trends and ensure that lessons learned are embedded into service improvements.
- To provide oversight and final approval for responses to complex or high-risk complaints.
- To ensure compliance with CQC fundamental standards regarding complaints.

Communication and Training

Effective communication and comprehensive training are crucial for the successful implementation and adoption of this complaints policy.

Initial communication: Upon approval, this policy will be disseminated to all employees and contractors via email. It will also be added to SharePoint. Line managers of employed staff will be responsible for verbally communicating the policy's key principles to their teams during scheduled team meetings within one month of its release. Contractors will be expected to keep current with policies as per the terms and conditions of their engagement with Psychiatry UK.

Ongoing communication: Regular reminders about the policy, including updates or revisions, will be circulated quarterly via internal newsletters and reinforced during annual performance reviews. Key changes will be highlighted in all-staff emails and discussed in team meetings. Contractors will be expected to keep current with policies as per the terms and conditions of their engagement with Psychiatry UK via the Contractor Information Directory.

Training products

Workshop sessions: Face-to-face or virtual workshop sessions will be available to provide in-depth training on complaint resolution techniques, de-escalation strategies, and effective communication with complainants.

Quick reference guides: Concise quick reference guides will be distributed to all relevant staff and made available digitally. These will summarise key steps and contact information for support.

Success Criteria and Monitoring Compliance

We will know that this complaints policy has been consistently adopted and is delivering its intended outcomes and objectives through a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures.

Success criteria

- Increased complaint resolution rate: Aim for an 85% resolution rate for all complaints within the stipulated period.
- Reduced complaint escalation: A 20% reduction in the number of complaints escalated to senior management or external bodies within the first year of policy implementation.
- Improved complainant satisfaction: Achieve an average satisfaction score of four out of five in post-resolution surveys conducted with complainants.
- Timely acknowledgment and response: 95% of complaints acknowledged within three working days and a final response provided within 30 working days.
- Consistent application of procedures: Internal audits will reveal a high level of adherence to the documented complaint handling procedures across all departments.
- Positive employee and contractor feedback: Surveys will indicate a clear understanding of the policy and confidence in applying its principles.

Monitoring compliance

Compliance with this policy will be monitored through a multi-faceted approach:

- Complaint log analysis: The quality and safety team will regularly review the centralised complaint log to track key metrics such as volume, resolution times, types of complaints, and outcomes. This analysis will be conducted monthly and reported quarterly to the senior leadership team.
- Internal audits: The internal audit team will conduct bi-annual audits of complaint handling processes across various departments. These audits will assess adherence to procedures, documentation standards, and the quality of resolutions.
- Complainant feedback surveys: The customer experience department will administer post-resolution surveys to a representative sample of complainants to gather feedback on their experience with the complaints process and resolution. This data will be collected continuously and reviewed monthly.
- Employee and contractor feedback: Regular pulse surveys and feedback mechanisms will be utilised to gauge understanding and confidence in applying the policy.
- Training completion rates: The People and Culture Team will monitor mandatory training completion rates for all relevant roles. Non-compliance will be flagged to line managers and clinical leads for follow-up.

- Reporting: A comprehensive report detailing compliance metrics, trends, and areas for improvement will be presented to the executive committee annually by the associate director of clinical governance.

Consultation, Review and Auditing

- This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if there are significant changes to Psychiatry UK's services, regulatory requirements, or organisational structure. The review will ensure the policy remains effective, relevant, and aligned with our commitment to providing high-quality, safe, and accessible mental healthcare, continuously incorporating learnings from complaints will also influence or patient safety incidents and evolving PSIRF guidance.
- This complaints policy has been developed through a collaborative consultation process to ensure it is comprehensive, practical, and reflects the diverse needs and perspectives within Psychiatry UK. The quality and safety team will review the complaints; the key metrics will be part of the suite of metrics produced by the data analytics team each month. It is the quality and safety team's role to review them and share learning/themes.
- The quality and safety team will report on key metrics regarding complaints quarterly at each quality and safety committee. Audits will be conducted on a biannual basis to determine the quality and timeliness of complaint handling. These audits will assess adherence to procedures, documentation standards, and the quality of resolutions. All complaints will be subject to a 10% quality check monthly from the complaints manager this will be reported to the relevant committees, managers, and individual staff within the organisation.
- Complainant feedback calls will be made post-resolution to a representative sample of complainants to gather feedback on their experience with the complaints process and resolution. This data will be collected continuously and reviewed monthly.
- Training completion rates will monitor mandatory training completion rates for all relevant roles. Non-compliance will be flagged to line managers for follow-up.

References and Resources and Relevant Legislation

- [Regulation 16: Receiving and acting on complaints - Care Quality Commission](#)
- [Ombudsman Association | Ombudsman Association](#)
- [The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints \(England\) Regulations 2009](#)