



Youth Work Ireland

# **Youth Work Ireland Feedback & Complaints Policy**

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## 1. Policy Statement

1.1. Youth Work Ireland is open to feedback both positive and negative. We are committed to taking seriously any complaint that concerned individuals have about our activities and equally we welcome suggestions and observations that can lead to learning and improvements.

## 2. Purpose

2.1. This policy is intended to ensure that all complaints are taken seriously and addressed in an appropriate and professional manner.

## 3. Scope

3.1. This policy covers all actions to be taken in respect to a complaint by a concerned individual. Complaints can be made against any aspect of Youth Work Ireland National Office's activities.

PLEASE NOTE: Any complaint concerning affiliated Clubs or Member Youth Services (MYS) that are part of the Youth Work Ireland Federation must be addressed to the local club and/or the Member Youth Services.

Youth Work Ireland is a Federation of 21 Member Youth Services. Most of these members have local voluntary Youth Clubs affiliated to them. Complaints in relations to clubs should in the first instance be taken up directly to the leadership in the club. If the result of this is not satisfactory, the complaint should be made to the local relevant regional Member Youth Service. If full resolution is not found at this level the matter can then be referred to the National Office.

Only complaints specifically in relation to National Office activities should be made directly to National Office in the first instance.

3.2. This policy applies to all staff members and to representatives from other agencies currently working for Youth Work Ireland National Office.

## 4. Glossary

4.1. **Complaint:** means a complaint about any action of the organisation that:

- A. in the view of the individual logging the complaint, is unsatisfactory or unacceptable
- B. adversely affects the person by whom or on whose behalf the complaint is made

For the avoidance of doubt, complaints may only be made in respect of actions which have already been taken.

4.2. **Concerned individuals:** Includes anyone who is directly affected by the actions of the organisation but excludes anyone who works for the organisation either in a paid or voluntary capacity, such as staff members or volunteers. These groups should use internal

management structures and / or the organisation's grievance procedure in the event that they wish to complain about a decision affecting them.

Member Youth Services wishing to bring up either feedback or a complaint to the National Office should use the dispute resolution mechanisms outlined in the Membership Charter. Clubs should go through the local resolution process of the MYS they are affiliated with.

**4.3. Staff member:** is construed broadly, and includes, for the purposes of this policy: staff members, volunteers, interns and temporary staff.

**4.4. Organisation:** Youth Work Ireland National Office

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

### 5.1.1 National Office Management are responsible for:

5.1.1. Ensuring all staff members are aware of this policy and are able to advise concerned individuals on same.

5.1.2. Ensuring that all complaints received are handled in line with this policy.

5.1.3. Regularly monitoring the number, nature and outcome of complaints as part of the continuous quality improvement process.

5.1.4. Appointing a Complaints Officer to fulfil the duties outlined in this procedure.

5.1.5. Ensuring that the Complaints Policy information is readily available to the public such as being easy to find and read on the website

### 5.2. All staff members, after appropriate training and information is received, are responsible for:

5.2.1. Ensuring that concerned individuals are made aware of the complaints policy as appropriate

5.2.2. Assisting concerned individuals to make a complaint as outlined in this policy when requested to do so

5.2.3. Following all other steps regarding complaints as outlined in this policy

## 6. Principles

6.1. All complaints should be dealt with promptly, and within the timescales outlined.

6.2. Complaints should be resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible in the circumstances.

6.3. Complainants should be told what will happen with their complaint: next steps, timeframe, appeal options etc

6.4. Complainants should be supported and given appropriate assistance throughout the procedure. They should be given the opportunity to be supported by an advocate. For the purposes of this policy an advocate is taken as being anyone who has the complainant's written permission to complain on their behalf, excluding staff members. A parent or guardian may complain on behalf of a child.

6.5. The complaints procedure should be well publicised. A template is included in Appendix I of this policy document and should be displayed prominently in the National Office and on the website [www.youthworkireland.ie](http://www.youthworkireland.ie).

6.6. All complaints must be properly recorded. The Complaints Officer is responsible for ensuring that complaints are properly dated, recorded and signed by the complainant, the staff member recording the complaint and the Complaints Officer. Alterations to the complaint should be recorded, signed and dated.

6.7. A complaints file must be maintained and regularly monitored by the Complaints Officer.

## **7. Basic Information**

### **Who can make a complaint?**

7.1. Anyone who is a concerned individual for the purposes of 4.2

7.2. An advocate may also complain on a concerned individual's behalf provided they have the concerned individual's written consent.

7.3. A parent / guardian may complain on behalf of a child.

### **What can they complain about?**

7.4. Any action of Youth Work Ireland's National Office that has directly affected them. This might include:

7.4.1. The manner in which the organisation has treated them

7.4.2. The actions of a specific member of staff

### **How can complaints be made?**

7.5. Complaints may be made in any form. However, once a complaint moves to Stage 2 (see Section 8, below), it must be recorded in writing.

### **Acknowledgement of written complaints**

7.6. Youth Work Ireland National Office will make every effort possible to notify the complainant in writing within 15 working days of a written complaint being received:

7.6.1 That the complaint has been so received

7.6.2 An outline of the steps that the organisation proposes to take in investigating the complaint

7.6.3 A proposed time limit for the completion of the investigation

7.6.4 A contact person for the complainant

### **Complaints involving staff**

7.7. If the complaint is about a member of staff, the complainant should in the first instance contact said staff member and seek direct resolution. If a satisfactory resolution isn't reached or if the complainant feels it is unsafe to reach out for direct resolution, then the complainant should contact the staff member's line manager. The next recourse is to be referred to the Complaints Officer and to place a written complaint with him/her. Further

recourse, in the unlikely event of this being necessary, is with the CEO, or with a board member in the event of the complaint being against the CEO.

At any stage when the complainant feels it is necessary to move to a written complaint, he or she

7.7.1. may be supported to put the complaint in writing

7.7.2. will be told that the staff member will be notified of the complaint against them

7.7.3. will be told that their complaint will be acknowledged as per section 7.6.1

### **What are the time limits for complaints?**

7.8. A complaint must be made within 12 months of the date of the action giving rise to the complaint or within 12 months of the complainant becoming aware of the action giving rise to the complaint.

7.8.1. The Complaints Officer may decide to extend the time limit for making a complaint if in their opinion special circumstances make it appropriate to do so. Special circumstances may include but are not limited to the following:

7.8.1.1. If the complainant is ill or bereaved

7.8.1.2. If new relevant, significant and verifiable information relating to the action becomes available to the complainant

7.8.1.3. If it is considered in the public interest to investigate the complaint

7.8.1.4. If the complaint concerns an issue of such seriousness that it cannot be ignored

7.8.1.5. Diminished capacity of the complainant at the time of the experience e.g. mental health, critical/long-term illness

7.8.1.6. Where extensive support was required to make the complaint and this took longer than 1 month

7.8.2. The Complaints Officer must notify the complainant of the decision to extend /not extend the time limits within 15 working days

### **Are there any matters excluded from the complaints process?**

7.9. A person is not entitled to make a complaint about any of the following matters:

7.9.1. A matter that is or has been the subject of legal proceedings before a court or tribunal;

7.9.2. A matter that could prejudice an investigation being undertaken by the Garda Síochána;

7.9.9. A matter that has been brought before any other complaints procedure established under an enactment.

### **Redress**

7.10. Youth Work Ireland states that

7.10.1. Redress should be consistent and fair for both the complainant and the staff member (or the National Office as a whole as the case may be) against which the complaint was made.

7.10.2. Youth Work Ireland will offer forms of redress or responses that are appropriate and reasonable where it has been established that a measurable loss, detriment or disadvantage was suffered or sustained by the claimant personally.

7.10.3. This redress could include:

- Apology
- Explanation
- Refund
- Admission of fault
- Change of decision
- Replacement
- Correction of misleading or incorrect records
- Technical or financial assistance
- Recommendation to make a change to a relevant policy or activity

## **8. Complaints Management**

We hope that most problems could be resolved by simply getting in touch with the member of staff responsible for the action that the complainant refers to, or their Line Manager. However, if a person is not satisfied that the problem has been resolved or handled to their satisfaction, they are entitled to make a formal written complaint. To re-iterate the scope of this procedure strictly concerns the National Office and not the MYS or clubs.

There are 4 stages to the complaints procedure:

**Stage 1 - Direct resolution with the staff member**

**Stage 2 - Resolution with their line manger**

**Stage 3 - Written complaint to the YWI Complaints Officer**

**Stage 4 - Youth Work Ireland Board for appeal**

### **8.1. Stage 1 - Direct resolution with the staff member**

8.1.1. If it has been established that the area of work where a problem occurred is managed by Youth Work Ireland National Office then the complainant should inform the staff member responsible. The staff member will make every effort to resolve the problem at this first point of contact. The staff member may seek assistance from their line manager at this stage in resolving the problem.

#### **Stage 2 - Direct resolution with the staff member's line manager**

8.1.2. In the event that the problem cannot be resolved in this way it can be take to the line manager, but if this also fails then it must be recorded as a formal written complaint to be progressed further.

### **8.2. Stage 3 - Managing a written complaint**

#### **8.2.1. Informal resolution of a complaint**

8.2.1.1. The Complaints Officer, taking into account the nature and circumstance of the complaint, may seek the consent of the complainant to finding an informal resolution by the parties concerned.

8.2.1.2. Where an informal resolution is not applicable or not successful, the Complaints Officer will initiate a formal investigation.

#### **8.2.2. Formal resolution of a complaint**

8.2.2.1. The complaint should be reviewed by the Complaints Officer, to confirm that they are in possession of a written record of the complaint which is signed and dated by the complainant, which contains all of the required information, and which clearly sets out the nature of the complaint, why the initial response was unsatisfactory and what the complainant would like to see happen next.

8.2.2.2. The Complaints Officer will write to the complainant in line with 7.6.

8.2.2.3. The Complaints Officer will investigate the complaint and may draw on appropriate expertise as required for example a lawyer, Health & Safety Officer, Compliance Officer, Data Protection Officer etc .

8.2.2.4. The complainant and any third parties involved will be given the opportunity to discuss the complaint with the Complaints Officer.

8.2.2.5. The Complaints Officer will endeavour to complete an investigation of the complaint within 30 working days of acknowledging the complaint. If this is not possible, within 30 working days of acknowledging the complaint, the complainant must be informed of the delay and given an indication of the time it will take to complete the investigation. The complainant and relevant third parties must be updated every 20 working days.

8.2.2.6. Where the investigation passes the 30 working days timeframe, the complainant must be informed of the delay and the Complaints Officer must endeavour to complete the investigation within 6 months.

8.2.2.7. Where deadlines are not met, the complainant must be informed that they can chose to move to stage 4 of the complaints management process

8.2.2.8. The Complaints Officer will inform the complainant and any relevant third parties of the outcome of the investigation in writing. The letter must state whether the complaint has been upheld, and whether any further action will be taken.

8.2.2.9. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they should be informed of the Stage 4 Appeal process.

#### **8.4 Stage 4 - Youth Work Ireland Board Appeal**

8.4.1 Where a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of an investigation, the complainant may request a review of the complaint by the Board of Youth Work Ireland.

8.4.2 All requests for reviews should be addressed to the Chair of the Board who will endeavour to acknowledge the complaint within 15 working days and do everything he or she can to resolve it within another 15 working days. If this is not possible, he or she will explain why and provide a new deadline.

8.4.3 The Chair will review the processes used to carry out the investigation of the complaint and the findings and recommendations made post-investigation.

8.4.5 The Chair will either up-hold, vary or make a new finding and recommendation.

NB: The Youth Work Ireland Chair of the Board can be contacted via the National Office.

## 9 Anonymous Complaints

9.1 In the event that an anonymous complaint is received, Youth Work Ireland National Office will note the issues raised and, where necessary try and resolve it appropriately. An anonymous complaint may be referred for investigation:

9.2 If there was good reason why the complaint was being made on an anonymous basis, for example, if there was a concern by the complainant that if their identity was revealed it could lead to negative consequences, also depending on the seriousness of the allegation being made, an investigation may or may not be conducted. This should be at the discretion of the CEO. If the allegation involves the CEO, it should be referred to the Chair of the Board.

9.3 If the allegation can be properly investigated either by talking to a third party witness, or with evidence provided within the complaint, and where there is no need for further contact with the anonymous complainant, an investigation may take place.

9.4 Any complaint involving a minor will be investigated and handled in a confidential manner according to the organisation's Safeguarding Policy.

9.5 In the case that a complaint cannot be fully investigated, the complaint will not be referred to in the staff file or will not in any other way impact upon normal working processes or staff roles etc., except if and when this has been agreed by all involved including the staff member named in the complaint.

9.6 If the complaint relates to the general service delivery this will be referred to the CEO and remedial action will be implemented if appropriate.

9.7 A record of all complaints will be retained on file by the Complaints Officer.

9.8 The organisation will continue to promote the complaints procedure and ensure appropriate supports are in place to facilitate complaints.

## 10 Reporting on Complaints

The Complaints Officer will prepare a report for the Board on a quarterly basis even if no new complaints were lodged. The report should include:

- The total number of complaints
- The nature of complaints
- The number of complaints resolved by informal means
- The outcome of any investigations into the complaints

### Complaints Process - Information for concerned individuals

#### Who can complain?

1) Anyone who avails of the YWI National Office services or programmes and/or who interacts with the National Office staff in their professional role and capacity.

- 2) An advocate may complain on the concerned person's behalf provided they have their written consent.
- 3) A parent / guardian may complain on behalf of a child.

#### **What can you complain about?**

- 1) a YWI National Office event or product that had an adverse effect
- 2) A decision made about you that affects you
- 5) A member of staff's actions in their professional role and capacity

#### **Important things to note:**

- 1) You have the right to complain when you are unhappy with an action taken by YWI National Office.
- 2) If the member of staff themselves cannot address your issue and if their line manager cannot either, then they will help you write down your complaint so that it can go to the Complaints Officer
- 3) If you make a complaint then you will not be treated differently following the complaint. Youth Work Ireland National Office sees feedback as a way to improve what we do.

#### **Complaints involving staff:**

If you wish to make a complaint about a staff member

- Please tell the staff member first and seek direct resolution
- if this does not work out satisfactorily, inform their Line Manager
- if this is also not satisfactory, log a written complaint with the Complaints Officer
- in cases where the formal investigation by the Complaints Officer does not satisfy either, you can address an appeal request to the Chair of the Board
- If you wish to complain about the Complaints Officer then the complaint should go to the CEO, unless it is about the CEO also, in which case it should go to the Chair of the Board.
- should the Complaint Investigation process reveal that the Staff member breached either the Child Protection and Safeguarding policies, or the HR policy, or a law, then the Complaint may lead to disciplinary procedures and/or legal actions being entered into, as appropriate, and may lead to the Complaint going into the staff member's HR file. In all other cases, the Complaint will be only documented in the Complaints file and NOT in the HR records.

#### **NB RE Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour:**

Unreasonable complainant behaviour will not be tolerated, such as if the complainant is aggressive, threatening, or makes excessive or inappropriate demands from the staff member, their line manager, the Complaints Officer, or anyone else they interact with in National Office about their complaint.

Unreasonable complainant behaviour includes unreasonable persistence, unreasonable demands, unreasonable lack of cooperation, unreasonable arguments, threats, intimidation or abuse.

Staff should record such behaviour.

Proportionate measures can and will be taken in response to such behaviour, and the staff member's line manager will support them in this where necessary. These can include for instance, placing a limitation on the channels and times the complainant may use to contact staff and/or asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their future conduct.

**Support to Staff:**

While staff are encouraged to view feedback as a positive and a way for the organisation to learn and improve, the professional and personal needs of staff affected by feedback should be identified and addressed as such a process can cause significant stress, even when unreasonable complainant behaviour has not become an issue and even for what may appear to be minor complaints.

Individual responses will vary and so will the need for support for the staff member to deal with the physical and emotional stress of receiving a complaint about their work.

The Complaints Officer and the staff member's line manager must ensure that fair procedure and support are provided, and that respectful, empathetic and confidential treatment are afforded to staff. This begins with being advised of their rights, which include:

- Time to deal with and respond to the complaint;
- Opportunity to give their side of the story;
- Opportunity to be accompanied and supported by a work colleague, trade union representative or other official, during the investigation;
- Emphasis on resolution, not blame.
- A process to appeal decisions taken on the basis of the complaint, that negatively affect them either professionally or personally.

## Complaints Record Form (Appendix 1)

Date of complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaint made by: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaint received by (staff members' name): \_\_\_\_\_

Complaint received by post? In person? Scanned in an email? Please choose as appropriate  
Is there any attachments/ supporting documents? Yes or No?

### Complainant details:

Name of complainant(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address of complainant(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

If a complaint is being made on behalf of someone else:

1. Who is the complaint on behalf of: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who is making the complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is their relationship \_\_\_\_\_

4. Does the representative have the complainant's written consent to represent their interests? (unless the case pertains to a child/a vulnerable person where this is irrelevant)  
Yes No

Details of the complaint (If insufficient space, attach extra pages). Please include:

- Who was involved?
- What happened, where and when?
- What are you concerned about?
- Have you done anything already to resolve this matter?
- What would you like to see happen?

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