

Youth Legal (YL) Complaints Policy

1. Introduction and purpose

Youth Legal (“YL”) is committed to providing high-quality, respectful and accessible services to the people and communities we support.

We aim to deal with complaints promptly, fairly, openly and effectively. We welcome feedback about our work and recognise that, from time to time, clients, approved suppliers or other third parties may be dissatisfied with a service they have received or with the way in which they have been treated.

We take complaints seriously. Complaints provide an opportunity to address concerns, put things right where appropriate, and identify ways in which our services and practices can be improved.

This policy explains what constitutes a complaint, how complaints can be made, how YL will consider them and what a complainant can expect from us.

No person will be disadvantaged in accessing YL’s services because they have made a complaint in good faith.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is any written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about YL, our services, or the conduct or actions of a member of staff, volunteer or trustee, where the person making the complaint would like YL to respond or take action.

A complaint may be made by letter, email, telephone, in person or by another accessible means. A person does not need to use the word “complaint” for their concern to be treated as one.

A complaint may involve, for example:

- dissatisfaction with the handling or outcome of a case;
- unreasonable delays, lack of case progress or failure to respond;
- dissatisfaction with communication;
- the conduct, behaviour or attitude of a member of staff, volunteer or trustee;
- failure to follow YL’s policies or procedures;
- concerns about how a decision affecting a service user was reached or communicated;
- unfair, discriminatory or disrespectful treatment;
- concerns about confidentiality or the handling of personal information;
- failure to make reasonable adjustments or address accessibility needs; or

- any other concern about the way in which YL has delivered its services or carried out its responsibilities.

Minor concerns may often be resolved quickly and informally. However, where a person makes clear that they wish to make a formal complaint, YL will not decline to treat the matter as a complaint merely because YL considers the issue to be minor.

3. What is not dealt with under this policy?

Some matters require a different process and will not normally be dealt with under this Complaints Policy. These include:

- **Safeguarding concerns**, which will be dealt with under YL's safeguarding procedures and escalated immediately where necessary;
- **Staff grievances or employment matters**, which will be dealt with under YL's relevant employment or grievance procedures;
- **Whistleblowing concerns**, where these fall within YL's whistleblowing arrangements;
- **Requests to exercise data-protection rights**, such as subject access requests, although a complaint about how YL has handled personal information may fall within this policy;
- **Disagreement with a legal or professional assessment solely because the outcome was not the one sought**, unless the complaint concerns the way the service was provided, the process followed, unreasonable delay, conduct or another matter within this policy;
- matters which are already the subject of legal proceedings where dealing with the complaint could prejudice those proceedings; and
- complaints which have already been fully considered under this procedure, unless significant new information has become available.

Where a concern falls more appropriately under another YL procedure, we will explain this to the person raising it and, where possible, direct the matter to the appropriate person or process.

YL may decline to investigate complaints which are abusive, threatening, persistently repetitive without raising any material new issue, or otherwise amount to an unreasonable use of the complaints procedure. Any such decision will be made carefully and will not be based simply on the fact that a complainant is persistent or strongly disagrees with YL.

4. Information provided to clients and how to make a complaint

Clients will be informed in writing at the outset of their matter of their right to complain and how a complaint may be made.

Where applicable to the services provided, clients will also be informed of their rights to refer complaints to the **Legal Ombudsman** and/or the **Financial Ombudsman Service**, including the applicable time limits and current contact information.



A complaint may be made in writing, by email, by telephone, in person or by another accessible means.

We encourage complaints to be raised as soon as reasonably possible so that the circumstances can be properly investigated.

Complainants should, where possible, explain:

- what happened;
- when it happened;
- who was involved;
- why they are dissatisfied; and
- what they would like YL to do to resolve the matter.

YL will make reasonable adjustments to the complaints process where required to ensure that it is accessible.

5. Our complaints procedure

Stage 1 – Early or informal resolution

Where appropriate, YL will first seek to resolve a concern quickly and informally. This may involve discussing the issue with the complainant, clarifying what happened, providing further information, apologising where appropriate, or taking practical steps to resolve the concern.

Informal resolution will not be required where the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, or where the nature or seriousness of the complaint makes a formal investigation more appropriate.

If the matter cannot be resolved informally, or the complainant requests a formal response, it will proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal investigation

Formal complaints will be acknowledged within **5 working days**.

The **Complaints Officer** will ordinarily have responsibility for coordinating and investigating formal complaints. The Complaints Officer will:

- review the complaint and relevant records;
- discuss the matter with relevant staff or other persons where appropriate;
- identify the issues raised and, where possible, their underlying causes;
- assess the complaint fairly in light of the available evidence;
- determine whether the complaint, in whole or in part, should be upheld; and
- identify appropriate redress or other action where required.

YL will aim to provide a written response within **20 working days** of acknowledging the complaint.



Where a matter is particularly complex and more time is required, YL will inform the complainant of the reason for the delay and provide an expected response date. Any applicable regulatory or Ombudsman deadline must nevertheless be observed.

The response will normally explain:

- the issues considered;
- the conclusions reached;
- whether the complaint, or any part of it, has been upheld;
- any action YL proposes to take as a result; and
- how the complainant can take the matter further if they remain dissatisfied.

Independence and conflicts of interest

No person will investigate or determine a complaint concerning their own conduct or a matter in which they have a material conflict of interest.

Accordingly:

Complaint concerning the Complaints Officer:

Where the complaint concerns the Complaints Officer, or the Complaints Officer had material personal involvement in the matter giving rise to the complaint such that their independence could reasonably be questioned, the complaint will be referred to the **Director**, who will investigate it or appoint another suitably independent person to do so.

Complaint concerning the Director:

Where the complaint concerns the Director, or the Director has a material conflict of interest, the complaint will be referred to the **Chair of the Board of Trustees**. The Chair will investigate it or appoint another suitably independent trustee or person to do so. The Director will not determine the outcome of a complaint concerning their own conduct.

Complaint concerning the Chair:

Where a complaint concerns the Chair of Trustees, it will be referred to another trustee who has not been involved in the matter. The Board may appoint an appropriately independent external person where necessary.

Complaint concerning another trustee:

Where a complaint concerns another trustee, that trustee will take no part in the investigation, decision or review of the complaint.

Where several senior individuals are involved, or where the Board considers that a sufficiently independent internal investigation is not possible, the Board will appoint an appropriately independent person to investigate or review the complaint.

This escalation structure takes precedence over the ordinary allocation of complaints to the Complaints Officer.



6. Stage 3 – Review

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage 2 response, they may request a review within **20 working days** of receiving that response.

The complainant should explain why they believe their complaint has not been satisfactorily addressed.

The review will be undertaken by a person who was not responsible for the original investigation and has no material conflict of interest. Depending upon the circumstances, this may be the Director, an uninvolved trustee, the Chair of Trustees or an appropriately independent person.

The purpose of the review is to consider whether:

- the complaint was investigated fairly and appropriately;
- the relevant issues and evidence were considered;
- the conclusions reached were reasonable in light of the available information; and
- appropriate action was taken or proposed.

YL will normally provide the outcome of the review within **20 working days**. Where this is not possible, the complainant will be informed of the reason and given an expected response date, subject always to any applicable regulatory deadline.

The Stage 3 response will normally conclude YL's internal complaints process.

7. Outcomes, redress and learning

Where a complaint is upheld, in whole or in part, YL will consider what action is appropriate. This may include:

- an explanation or apology;
- correcting an error;
- reviewing a decision or process;
- appropriate redress where applicable;
- taking steps to prevent a similar issue occurring again;
- providing additional guidance or training; or
- reviewing YL's policies, procedures or working practices.

8. Legal Ombudsman and Financial Ombudsman Service

YL aims to resolve complaints fairly through its internal complaints procedure. However, clients may have rights to refer certain complaints to an external Ombudsman.



Legal Ombudsman

Where a complaint concerns legal services falling within the Legal Ombudsman's jurisdiction, a complainant may be entitled to ask the Legal Ombudsman to consider the complaint if YL has issued its final response or has not resolved the complaint within the applicable period.

YL will provide complainants with current information about their Legal Ombudsman rights and applicable time limits in its client information and relevant final responses.

Ombudsman's contact:

PO Box 6806

Wolverhampton

WV1 9WJ

Via email on: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk

By phone number: 0300 555 0333 or at www.legalombudsman.org.uk

Financial Ombudsman Service

Where a complaint concerns services falling within the jurisdiction of the Financial Ombudsman Service, a complainant may be entitled to refer the complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

YL will comply with the applicable complaints-handling requirements and will provide complainants with current information concerning their referral rights, relevant time limits and Financial Ombudsman Service contact details in the appropriate final response.

Contact:

Via email at: complaint.info@financial-ombudsman.org.uk

By phone number: 0300 123 9 123 or 0800 023 456

Immigration advice

For complaints concerning immigration advice, you may also have a right to complain to the relevant regulator.

Contact the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) at any time.

Please complete the attached complaint form and email it to: complaints@oisc.gov.uk

Professional conduct

Concerns about the professional conduct of a solicitor may, where appropriate, be reported to the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA).

We will tell you about any external complaints route relevant to your complaint, including applicable time limits and contact details, when we provide our final response.



9. Other external organisations

Depending on the nature of the complaint and the services concerned, other external bodies may also be relevant, including the Charity Commission, Information Commissioner's Office, Solicitors Regulation Authority, Fundraising Regulator or another relevant professional or regulatory body.

Where an external complaints route is relevant to a particular complaint, YL will provide appropriate information to the complainant.

10. Confidentiality and fairness

Complaints will be handled sensitively and information will only be shared with those who need it in order to investigate, respond to, or oversee the complaint, subject to YL's legal, professional, regulatory and safeguarding obligations.

All parties involved in a complaint will be treated fairly and given an appropriate opportunity to provide relevant information.

Making a complaint in good faith will not adversely affect a person's access to YL's services.

11. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed **annually** by the Director and Board of Trustees, or earlier where:

- relevant legislation or regulatory requirements change significantly;
- Ombudsman requirements relevant to YL change;
- a serious complaint identifies a need for review; or
- experience of operating the policy indicates that changes are required.

Policy owner: Board of Trustees

Operational responsibility: Director / Complaints Officer

Date of review: 30/09/2026

