

# Feedback and Complaints Policy

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| Date of policy:          | May 2024          |
| Last review date:        | September 2026    |
| Next policy review date: | September 2027    |
| Person/s responsible:    | Company Directors |

*This policy is under regular review. Updates will be made to reflect developments in procedures and best practice*

## Introduction

National Neurodiversity Assessments (trading under Speech and Language Therapy West Midlands Ltd) believe that communication is a fundamental human right and we are committed to providing high quality speech and language therapy, autism and ADHD diagnostic services to enable people to reach their potential and achieve functional communication skills. It is therefore important to listen to our service users, commissioning bodies and people who access our service to help us improve our services. This Feedback and Complaints Policy covers how we will process, respond to, and act on what people tell us about our services.

We want people to tell us if:

- They are very satisfied with the service they have received so that National Neurodiversity Assessments staff can be told;
- They have a suggestion on how we might improve services;
- They are dissatisfied with any aspect of a service or
- We have fallen short of the standards we set ourselves in dealing with their complaints.

This policy is available on our website.

## Policy Brief and Purpose

Feedback and effective complaints management is fundamental to the provision of quality services and provides a platform for obtaining feedback.

This policy explains what service users, commissioning bodies and people who access our service can expect from us.

It explains how we collect feedback, what a complaint is and how we will resolve it.

## Regulatory Framework

This policy has been developed in accordance with:

- Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014

- CQC Fundamental Standards
- Local Authority Social Services and NHS Complaints (England) Regulations 2009
- NHS Complaint Standards Framework
- Equality Act 2010
- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018
- Duty of Candour Regulations
- NHS Constitution for England

This policy supports the organisation's commitment to providing safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led services.

## Our Aims

National Neurodiversity Assessments aims to provide an excellent service to service users, commissioning bodies and people who access our service. However, on the rare occasion when a complaint is received, National Neurodiversity Assessments has a robust process in place to respond to that concern.

National Neurodiversity Assessments aims to offer a fair, effective and timely response to any complaint it may receive, and is committed to learning from the feedback it receives to help reform policies and procedures and develop the services it provides.

National Neurodiversity Assessments will employ a range of feedback mechanisms to capture the views of people who access our service.

National Neurodiversity Assessments aims to share feedback with staff so they can reflect on their practice and this forms part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

## Alignment with NHS Complaint Standards Framework

This policy is aligned with the NHS Complaint Standards Framework's four principles:

1. Promoting a positive culture that welcomes and learns from feedback

2. Accessible and simple
3. Thorough and fair investigations
4. Giving fair and accountable responses

We continuously review our processes to ensure they meet these standards.

## Feedback

National Neurodiversity Assessments values all feedback because it helps us to improve our services and to identify where improvements can be made.

Where possible, National Neurodiversity Assessments encourages people who use our service to provide feedback directly to the assessor / clinician involved. This will give the therapist the opportunity to adjust to any concerns and is generally the best way to resolve an issue.

National Neurodiversity Assessments has a range of methods for collecting feedback which includes feedback forms, informal interviews and online surveys.

Feedback is overseen by the Directors.

A link to our feedback form can be found in the appendix of reports produced by National Neurodiversity Assessments.

People can also fill in a feedback form at any time by contacting our Admin Team who will be able to send a relevant feedback form to complete [info@saltwm.co.uk](mailto:info@saltwm.co.uk)

A direct link to our feedback form is provided here

<https://forms.gle/662GWNky77k9m3sc8>

## Accessibility and Inclusivity

We are committed to ensuring our feedback and complaints process is accessible to all. Feedback and complaints can be submitted in various formats to accommodate different needs:

- Written via email or letter

- Verbal which will be documented by staff
- In large print, audio format, or Braille upon request
- In different languages with translation services available
- Via assistive technology

Please inform us of any specific requirements you may have when providing feedback or making a complaint, and we will make reasonable adjustments to ensure you can fully participate in the process.

We will identify and record communication preferences and reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010 and NHS Accessible Information Standard requirements. Staff will ensure adjustments are considered throughout the complaints process.

### Support for Complainants

We recognise that making a complaint can be challenging. The following support is available:

- Our staff can provide guidance on how to make a complaint
- Independent advocacy services can be arranged for vulnerable individuals or those who need additional support
- For NHS service users, details of NHS Complaints Advocacy services will be provided upon request
- The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer advice and support for NHS-related complaints

Contact information for local advocacy services will be provided to complainants upon request.

### Raising a Concern or Complaint

National Neurodiversity Assessments works hard to provide excellent service. However, on the rare occasion when the service falls short of this, it is important that we have your concern or complaint in writing and sent to [info@saltwm.co.uk](mailto:info@saltwm.co.uk)

## Our Commitment to the Complainant

- National Neurodiversity Assessments will deal with all complaints fairly, confidentially and impartially.
- National Neurodiversity Assessments will show transparency, openness and honesty and record every complaint it receives.
- The complainant will be provided with a copy of this complaints policy and all appropriate contact details so that they can submit their complaint correctly and fully understand how long it will take to deal with the complaint at each stage.
- National Neurodiversity Assessments will acknowledge the receipt of the complaint within 3 working days
- National Neurodiversity Assessments will respond in writing within 10 working days.
- Complainants will be offered opportunities to discuss desired outcomes and what resolution would be meaningful to them.

## Our Commitment to Staff

In addition to above:

- If a National Neurodiversity Assessments associate or staff member is the subject of a concern or complaint, they will be informed within 3 working days.
- The associate or staff member will be provided with a copy of this complaints policy and all appropriate contact details so that they can fully understand the process and timelines.
- National Neurodiversity Assessments preference is to work with associates or staff who are the subject of complaints or concerns in order to address any issues.

## Duty of Candour

National Neurodiversity Assessments acknowledges and adheres to the statutory Duty of Candour requirements. When something goes wrong with a service user's care that appears to have caused or could lead to significant harm, we will:

- Inform the service user (or their advocate, family member, or carer) as soon as reasonably practicable
- Provide a truthful account of what happened
- Apologise
- Explain what steps we are taking to investigate
- Offer appropriate remedy or support
- Document all communication relating to the incident

This commitment to openness and transparency is embedded throughout our complaint handling process.

Please refer to our Duty of Candour Policy for further information.

### **Safeguarding Concerns During Complaints**

Where a complaint identifies actual or potential safeguarding concerns involving a child or adult at risk:

- Staff must immediately follow the Safeguarding Policy
- Concerns will be escalated to the Safeguarding Lead
- Referrals may be made to statutory safeguarding agencies where appropriate
- Actions taken and rationale will be fully documented

Complaint management must not delay safeguarding action.

### **Complaint Investigation**

The complaint will be managed by a company director. The complaint investigation will seek to establish the views of the parties and gather any other relevant information to fully investigate the complaint.

If it has not been possible to complete the investigation within the time frame, National Neurodiversity Assessments will provide an interim report giving reasons for the delay and the likely timeframe for resolution.

At the end of the investigation, National Neurodiversity Assessments will produce a report which provides a recommendation as to whether the complaint should be upheld fully, partially or not at all.

The outcome of any investigation will be given to the complainant and staff member within 10 working days, giving appropriate details of appeals/escalation routes available if they are not happy with the response provided. If an appeal has not been lodged within 10 working days of receipt of the outcome National Neurodiversity Assessments will formally close the complaint.

### **Upheld Complaints**

If a complaint is upheld, National Neurodiversity Assessments will take appropriate action and/or make appropriate changes to their policies and procedures where needed.

National Neurodiversity Assessments will respond to the complainant and staff member with a full account of decisions and any corrective actions where applicable

National Neurodiversity Assessments will log, review and implement where relevant any:

- lessons learned
- recommendations
- findings

The complainant and staff member have the right to appeal/escalate any decision.

### **Complaints which are not upheld**

If the complaint is not upheld, National Neurodiversity Assessments will provide full reasons why, to the complainant and staff member.

The complainant and staff member have the right to appeal/escalate any decision.

### **Learning and Service Improvement**

We view complaints as valuable opportunities for learning and improvement. We commit to:

- Regularly reviewing trends and themes in complaints
- Implementing action plans to address identified issues
- Sharing anonymised learning across the organization
- Involving service users in service improvement initiatives where appropriate
- Following up on implemented changes to ensure effectiveness

Staff will receive regular updates on improvements made as a result of complaint feedback.

## Reporting and Governance

Complaint data will be:

- Analysed quarterly to identify trends and areas for improvement
- Reported to the company's senior management team
- Used to inform our quality improvement plans
- Anonymised and included in annual reports
- Shared with commissioners where contractually required

Regular audits of our complaints handling process will be conducted to ensure compliance with this policy and identify opportunities for improvement.

Complaint themes, actions, learning outcomes and improvement activity will be reviewed quarterly through governance meetings and incorporated into quality improvement planning.

Evidence of learning and actions arising from complaints will be retained for audit purposes.

## Fitness to Practice

When a concern or complaint raises a therapist's fitness to practice, the company director will commence the Fitness to Practice process (see Fitness to Practice Policy).

The director will be required to investigate and review the staff member or associates continued employment of National Neurodiversity Assessments. This may be due to the seriousness of the complaint or concern or the number of concerns or complaints directed towards one member of staff.

Where there are safeguarding risks or Fitness to Practice implications, National Neurodiversity Assessments will provide an immediate response to the complainant and notify the associate or staff member. The relevant professional body e.g. HCPC / GMC / NMC will also be notified. The Fitness to Practice review process is available in the Fitness to Practice Policy.

At all stages of a Fitness to Practice process, National Neurodiversity Assessments may temporarily suspend a staff member or place conditions on their practice.

### **Appealing the Complaint**

National Neurodiversity Assessments has an internal Appeals Process in place in the event that a complaint cannot be resolved.

The Appeal must be initiated within 10 Days of receipt of the outcome of the initial complaint.

If either the complainant or the staff member is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint and wishes to appeal the decision, National Neurodiversity Assessments will instigate a new investigation.

The new investigation will be completed by a different director, who will re-examine the complaint, how it was dealt with and whether the decision should be upheld (partially or wholly) or not upheld.

At the conclusion of the appeals process, a Completion of Procedures letter that details the outcome of the appeal will be sent to the complainant and staff member.

If following internal re-investigation, the complaint cannot be resolved or the complainant or staff member is dissatisfied with the outcome or the way National Neurodiversity Assessments dealt with the complaint/appeal National Neurodiversity

Assessments will escalate the matter to the relevant professional body in matters relating to professional conduct, or to the relevant ICB in matters relating to contract compliance.

The request for Escalation must be initiated within 10 Days of receipt of the Completion of Procedures letter.

### **The Escalation Process**

If concerns relate to professional conduct, fitness to practise or patient safety, information may be referred to the relevant professional regulator where appropriate.

For registered clinicians this may include the Health and Care Professions Council, General Medical Council, Nursing and Midwifery Council etc.

If concerns relate to process or contract compliance, this will be escalated to the relevant ICB.

### **Timeframes for External Escalation**

Following the 10-day window to initiate escalation to the professional body after receipt of the Completion of Procedures letter, the professional body will acknowledge receipt of the complaint. The professional body investigation process typically takes 6-8 weeks, though complex cases may take longer.

### **Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)**

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after the internal appeals process and professional body review, they have the right to escalate their complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO). The PHSO provides an independent service to handle complaints about the NHS in England that have not been resolved locally.

Complainants must typically approach the PHSO within 12 months of becoming aware of the issue. The PHSO will first assess whether the complaint meets their criteria for investigation before proceeding.

Contact details for the PHSO:

- Telephone: 0345 015 4033
- Website: [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)
- Email: [phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk)

## **Record Keeping and Data Protection**

All complaints will be recorded and documentation retained in line with NHS data retention policies. Complaint records will be kept for 10 years from the date of completion of the complaints process. All personal information will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR.

Complaint records will be stored securely using approved systems and shared only on a need-to-know basis in accordance with Information Governance procedures and NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit requirements.

Complainants have the right to access information held about their complaint in line with information governance legislation.

## **Staff Training**

All staff involved in receiving, managing or investigating complaints will receive appropriate training in:

- Complaint handling
- Duty of Candour
- Communication skills
- Equality and accessibility requirements
- Safeguarding responsibilities

Training compliance will be monitored through governance systems.

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

This policy has undergone an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure it does not disadvantage any protected characteristic groups under the Equality Act 2010. We are

committed to treating all complainants fairly and equitably regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

### **NHS Contract Compliance**

Where National Neurodiversity Assessments / Speech and Language Therapy West Midlands Ltd provides services under NHS contracts, we will comply with all specific complaint handling requirements stipulated in those contracts, including any reporting requirements and participation in quality review meetings.