Complaints Policy

Summit Explorers Ltd.

Policy owner	Dr James Wilkinson, Director
Approved/reviewed	September 2026
Review cycle	Annual, and sooner if law, guidance or Company practice changes
Applies to	Participants, parents/carers, schools and other clients, staff, contractors, volunteers and anyone using or affected by Summit Explorers services

1. Purpose and scope

Summit Explorers Ltd. aims to provide safe, high-quality outdoor education, DofE expedition support, climbing and related services. We welcome feedback and take complaints seriously. This policy explains how concerns can be raised, investigated and resolved fairly, respectfully and without unreasonable delay.

This policy covers complaints about our services, staff, leaders, contractors, communications, administration or decisions. It applies to direct bookings and to services delivered for schools or other organisations. It does not remove or limit any statutory or contractual right.

2. Matters requiring immediate action

Immediate danger or emergency	Call 999 and follow the event emergency procedure.
Safeguarding concern or disclosure	Do not use this complaints process as the first route. Follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy immediately.
Allegation about an adult working with children	Report it under the Safeguarding Policy without delay. It may require LADO/police advice rather than an internal complaint investigation.
Data-protection concern	Send it to james@summitexplorers.co.uk. A request to exercise data rights or a complaint to the ICO is handled under the Privacy Notice and data-protection process.

A complaint may reveal safeguarding, health and safety, discrimination, staff-conduct or criminal concerns. In that event, the Director may pause or adapt this process while the correct specialist procedure is followed. The complainant will be told what can be shared and why.

3. Principles

- Complaints are handled politely, fairly, proportionately and without discrimination or retaliation.
- We make reasonable adjustments so that a person can raise a complaint accessibly, including accepting support from a parent/carer, advocate or interpreter where appropriate.
- We keep people informed of progress and explain decisions in writing.
- We do not require a complainant to pursue informal resolution first where this would be inappropriate or they prefer a formal complaint.
- Information is kept confidential and shared only with people who need it to consider the complaint, protect a person's safety, meet legal duties or administer a remedy.

4. How to raise a complaint

We encourage people to raise a concern promptly, preferably within three months of the event or decision, so that we can investigate effectively. A later complaint will still be considered where this is reasonable, particularly where a child, safeguarding issue, illness, disability or other good reason affected the timing.

- Informal concern: speak to the leader or Dr James Wilkinson where it is safe and appropriate. Many issues can be resolved quickly at this stage.
- Formal complaint: email james@summitexplorers.co.uk or write to the Company's registered address. Please say that the message is a formal complaint.

Please include what happened; the date, location and service involved; the people involved; any evidence; what outcome you are seeking; and a safe way to contact you. We will help where someone cannot provide this in writing.

5. Stage 1: investigation and response

We will acknowledge a formal complaint within three working days. The Director will normally investigate and respond. The investigation may involve reviewing records, speaking to relevant people and seeking specialist advice. We will handle children's information and staff matters sensitively and may be unable to share confidential information about another person.

We aim to provide a written outcome within ten working days of acknowledgement. If this is not possible, for example because an expedition is in progress, key evidence is unavailable or a safeguarding process is underway, we will explain the reason and give a revised response date. We will normally provide the final response within 20 working days unless a different process is necessary.

The written response will summarise the complaint, investigation, findings, any remedy or service improvement, and the next step if the complainant remains dissatisfied. Remedies may include an explanation, apology, correction, practical action, review of

procedure or, where appropriate, a refund or other remedy in line with the booking terms and consumer law.

6. Stage 2: review

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may ask for a review within ten working days of the Stage 1 response, explaining the reason. We will accept a later request where reasonable. A review is appropriate where there is relevant new evidence, a material procedural concern, or a reasonable belief that the outcome was incorrect or disproportionate.

A person who was not involved in the original decision will review the matter wherever reasonably possible. As Summit Explorers is a small company, this may be an appropriately qualified independent person or external adviser. If the complaint concerns the Director, it will be referred directly to an independent person appointed for that purpose; the Director will not determine it.

We will acknowledge the review request within three working days and aim to issue the final written decision within ten working days. Where this is not possible, we will provide an update and revised timescale. The review decision is the end of the Company's internal process.

7. School and organisation clients

For services delivered to a school or organisation, we will normally keep the client's named contact informed where this is appropriate and lawful. The client may have its own complaints procedure, but this does not remove Summit Explorers' responsibility to examine a complaint about our own service. We will agree information-sharing and any practical response with the client, while preserving confidentiality and safeguarding obligations.

8. External advice and rights

Nothing in this policy prevents a consumer from seeking independent advice or using any legal right. Consumers may obtain free advice from Citizens Advice. If a consumer complaint cannot be resolved, we will provide the information required by the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015, including whether we are obliged or prepared to use an ADR entity. Summit Explorers is not currently obliged to use a particular ADR provider.

Where a concern relates to health and safety, safeguarding, discrimination, data protection, criminal conduct or a DofE programme requirement, the complainant may also have a route to the relevant regulator, local authority, police, ICO, client school/organisation or The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. We will not prevent a person from using those routes.

9. Records, confidentiality and learning

The Company keeps a secure complaints record containing the complaint, correspondence, evidence, decisions, actions and learning. Records are retained for six years unless a longer period is required because of insurance, legal proceedings, safeguarding, a contractual obligation or another lawful reason. Complaint themes are reviewed at least annually by the Director to identify training, policy, quality or safety improvements.

10. Unreasonable or persistent contact

We remain committed to hearing genuine concerns. However, where contact is abusive, threatening, discriminatory, knowingly false, repetitive without new information, or places an unreasonable burden on staff, the Director may set reasonable boundaries on communication. This will be done proportionately, explained in writing, and will never prevent the reporting of a safeguarding concern, whistleblowing concern or legal complaint.

Appendix A: What to expect

- Acknowledgement of a formal complaint within three working days.
- A fair investigation and a target written response within ten working days.
- Updates and a revised date if more time is genuinely needed.
- A review by someone not involved in the original decision wherever reasonably possible.
- Respectful treatment, reasonable adjustments and no retaliation for raising a complaint in good faith.