



Department for Education

Josh MacAlister OBE MP
Minister for Children and Families

Helen Hayes MP
Chair, Education Select Committee

Dear Helen,

2 February 2026

We thank the Committee's important scrutiny of this matter and welcome its thoughtful consideration of such a sensitive and significant issue. Thank you for the attention the Committee has given to ensuring that lessons are fully learned and applied. The Department continues to strengthen its approach in dealing with sensitive and complex complaints and has made several improvements since the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's (PHSO) report.

The Department for Education ensures that sensitive and complex complaints are handled appropriately—namely with sensitivity, timeliness, and effectiveness. We have outlined below the procedural changes implemented following the PHSO's investigation and subsequent report.

To ensure that safeguarding and whistleblowing cases are prioritised appropriately, we have introduced a strengthened triage process. This enables us to identify such cases at the point of receipt, ensuring they are reviewed urgently and that any necessary actions are taken without delay.

Following the issues identified during Mr U's complaint—specifically the inappropriate advice to exhaust the college's internal complaints process before our involvement—we have revised our approach. Safeguarding cases are now exempt from the requirement for providers' complaints processes to be exhausted prior to our consideration. These cases are referred immediately to the Provider Team for review and action. Only after a full assessment will the team advise a complainant to follow the provider's process, and only where this is determined to be the most appropriate course of action.

The Complaints Team now manages all cases through a central customer relationship management (CRM) system. This has improved record-keeping, strengthened consistency in case handling, and enabled more systematic case reviews. These improvements support better oversight and continuous improvement in service delivery.

We have invested significant time in reviewing and enhancing our internal guidance. This has included a full review of workflows, the development of clear process maps for each stage of case handling, and the introduction of updated supporting templates. These improvements have resulted in more efficient case management and greater consistency in how complaints are assessed and resolved.

The team recognised the need to incorporate greater empathy into its responses and to apply templates flexibly so that correspondence is more personal and better reflects each complainant's specific issues and concerns. To support this, staff have received targeted training to strengthen the quality and tone of complaint-handling. Provider teams also adopt a more personal and engaged approach where this is assessed to be the most appropriate way to support the complainant, and this approach has already been implemented in recent sensitive cases.

These improvements reflect our ongoing commitment to maintaining the highest standards in everything we do. We continuously review and refine our approach to provide the best possible experience for those who place their trust in us, and we remain dedicated to learning and improving wherever we can.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Josh MacAlister'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Josh' being more prominent and the last name 'MacAlister' written in a slightly more formal but still cursive style.

Josh MacAlister OBE MP
Minister for Children and Families