ALSPAC Complaints Policy

Part A – Policy Statement

Information for Participants and Members of the Public
The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), also known as Children of the 90s, are committed to carrying out high quality research.

However, sometimes study participants or others may wish to feed back their concerns, or make a complaint about the way the study is carried out. This policy sets out our commitment to treat all complaints seriously. We will quickly find out what has happened, and we will reply to all complaints received by us.

Complaints may be about any part of the study, for example:
   a. A member of ALSPAC staff
   b. A member of university staff on site at Oakfield House (or elsewhere)
   c. A study participant, or an accompanying person
   d. The building / equipment or other aspects of the study set-up
   e. The work of ALSPAC, how the research is organised or carried out

To make a complaint follow the process set out in Part B, “Making a Complaint”. The procedure is also set out in the chart below (Figure 1).

Complaints from Researchers
Researchers who wish to make a complaint about access to data or any other issue relating to the research process in ALSPAC should refer to the ALSPAC Access Policy. The Access Policy describes a separate process for handling these complaints. This policy can be found on our website at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/researchers/data-access/. Any other complaint can be made by following the process outlined in Part B.

Part B – Making a Complaint

Many complaints can be dealt with informally. After a discussion, you may be happy with the explanation and nothing else will need to be done.

Informal complaints about CLINIC VISITS may be discussed at the time with the Fieldworker or member of the administrative team. If you are complaining about any of these people, ask to speak to the Clinic Manager (telephone 0117 3310035). If you wish to make a complaint about your CLINIC VISIT after you have left the clinic, please contact the Clinic Manager directly.

1 Participants always have the option to withdraw from part or all of the study. Please see our website for more details: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/participants/ethics/changingyourmind
If the complaint is about a **QUESTIONNAIRE** or other written material, like a letter or a leaflet, please contact our hotline on 0117 331 0010.

If you have any questions, or a complaint about **DATA LINKAGE** (the way in which we use your official records held by the health service or government departments) or about how we use your **personal information**, then please contact our hotline on 0117 331 0010. If you would like to speak to someone independent of the Children of the 90s study, also please see the options at the end of this webpage: [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/participants/playingyourpart/aboutyourrecords/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/participants/playingyourpart/aboutyourrecords/)

To complain about **ANY OTHER PART OF THE STUDY** e.g. an ALSPAC event, or other contact with study staff, please call our hotline on 0117 331 0010. The hotline telephonist will connect you to the best person within ALSPAC team to deal with your enquiry.

**STAGE 1**

If your complaint cannot be satisfied by an informal discussion, and you wish to make a **FORMAL COMPLAINT**, we would like you to let us know as soon as possible. The sooner we know, it will make it easier for us to find out what happened. Your complaint should be made to the Deputy Executive Director, whose contact details are below. You may make a complaint either in writing (by letter or email), or by phone, or in person.

We will discuss your complaint with you and we will thoroughly investigate it. We will answer your complaint in writing within 15 working days of it being received by us.

If you raise a question of an ethical nature regarding ALSPAC’s research, your complaint will be referred to the ALSPAC Law and Ethics Committee for their opinion. Their views will be taken into consideration in our reply to you.

If there is any question that biological samples have been taken from you without your consent, or you think that your samples have been mis-used the detail of your complaint will be sent to the ALSPAC Executive Committee. Your complaint will be investigated by the Co-Director and Head of Laboratories. If necessary, the complaint will be sent to the University of Bristol’s Human Tissue Working Group as part of the investigation process. The complaint will be treated as a serious incident until the complaint has been investigated.

**STAGE 2**

Stage 2 provides a way for you to take your complaint further if you are not happy with the written reply sent to you at the end of Stage 1.
At Stage 2 you may take your complaint further by asking for a meeting with two members of the Senior Management Team. The meeting will take place within 15 working days. It will offer a chance to talk about your complaint in detail. The meeting date and time will be agreed with you and a letter sent to you to confirm this. After the meeting a letter will be sent to you as a record of what was said.

STAGE 3

Stage 3 provides a way of getting a second opinion about your complaint from the Management Group of the School of Social and Community Medicine.

If you would like this second view you must ask the Deputy Executive Director for this within 15 working days. The management group will look at the complaint and will make a final decision. A letter setting out their reply will be sent to you within 20 working days.

Useful Contacts and Telephone Numbers:

Postal Address:
Attention: Deputy Executive Director
Children of the 90s
ALSPAC
Oakfield House,
Oakfield Grove
Bristol
BS8 2BN

Telephone: 0117 331 0010
Email: info@childrenofthe90s.ac.uk
Website: childrenofthe90s.ac.uk

Clinic Manager’s telephone number: 0117 3310035. Email: jill.allen@bristol.ac.uk

Deputy Executive Director’s telephone number: 0117 3310116. Email: ross.robinson@bristol.ac.uk
Figure 1 – Complaints flowchart

You are unhappy and want to make a complaint. Can this be resolved informally through discussions with relevant staff within ALSPAC?

- **Yes**: Complaint Resolved?
  - Yes: Complaint Closed
  - No: Formal complaints procedure starts

If the complaint concerns an ethical question, the issue will be submitted to our ethical committee for their opinion.

**STAGE 1**

The complaint will be acknowledged to you in writing within 5 working days of receipt. A response sent to you within 15 working days.

- **Yes**: Complaint Resolved?
  - Yes: Complaint Closed
  - No: STAGE 2

If the complaint relates to use of a sample collected under ethical approval the complaint referred to Human Tissue Working Group.

**STAGE 2**

There will be a meeting between you (the person making the complaint) and two members of the Senior Management Team within 15 working days of referring to Stage 2.

The discussion and plans for action are recorded and a copy sent to you.

- **Yes**: Complaint Resolved?
  - Yes: Complaint Closed
  - No: STAGE 3

If the complaint concerns an ethical question, the issue will be submitted to our ethical committee for their opinion.

**STAGE 3**

You may appeal within 15 working days and the matter will be referred to the school management group of the School of Social & Community Medicine for consideration and final decision.

A written response will be sent within 10 days of referral to Stage 3.