UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

ACADEMY TRUST

Complaints Policy & Procedure

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Where the word 'Trust' is used in this document it refers to University of Lincoln Academy Trust.

Where the word 'Local Board' is used it refers to the Academy Monitoring Committee (AMC) of an individual academy within the Trust.

The term 'Trust Executive Leadership Team' (ELT) comprises, the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Finance Officer, Head of People and HR and Director of Primary Education.

Where the word 'users' is used it refers to staff, future staff issued with ICT access and/or hardware, AMC members, volunteers and regular visitors.

Where the phrase 'Senior Leader' is used, this refers to Principals, Headteachers or senior leaders within academies and our Trust.

Where the phrase 'Principal' is used, this also refers to Headteachers.

1.0 Policy Statement:

1.1 University of Lincoln Academy Trust is committed to ensuring that all pupils are provided with an outstanding educational experience and that each academy works in a productive and positive partnership with all parents and carers.

1.2 If a parent/carer feels that a situation has arisen that they are unhappy about then they have a right to make a complaint. All complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and professionally.

1.3 The relevant academy will try to resolve problems informally wherever possible. Where this is not achieved there are formal procedures described below. Formal escalation is not common because of our desire and commitment to work with families and young people.

1.4 Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

2.0 Definitions

2.1 For the purposes of this policy, we follow the Department of Education's guidance in defining concerns and complaints as follows:

A 'concern' is an 'expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A 'complaint' is 'an expression or statement of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.

Where this policy refers to 'complaints', it is taken to include 'concerns' also. Anyone raising a complaint is referred to in this policy as a 'complainant'.

2.2 The normal 'first port of call' for a complaint will usually be a class teacher or member of staff within an academy.

2.3 The timescales in this policy should be taken to apply from the point at which a complaint is received and understood by us. Complainants should ensure that their complaint has been received if they are in any doubt. The phrase 'working days' applies to days when our academies are open to pupils – it will take longer, in real time, to deal with complaints out of term-time, for example.

2.4 A complaint will be deemed 'closed' if, at any stage of the process, a complainant:

- notifies the academy or the Trust that they no longer wish to proceed
- fails to comply with the timescales set out for the escalation between stages
- otherwise fails to comply with any reasonable request made within the scope of this policy (for example, respond to communications via telephone or in writing within a reasonable timescale or to attend a scheduled meeting).

3.0 Scope of this Policy

3.1 This complaints policy applies to all complaints except for complaints relating to:

Exceptions	Who to contact
School Admissions	Complaints and concerns should be handled through a dedicated process, please see the relevant academy's Admissions Policy for details of this process. Links to each academy's website, where the policy is published, can be found via: www.uolat.co.uk
Child Protection and Safeguarding	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy which can be found on our website and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you should follow local procedures for child protection referrals. If there is no risk of immediate significant harm, then the complaint will be dealt with through this policy.
Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)	Dispute resolution and mediation in relation to identifying and supporting SEND is the responsibility of the Local Authority (Lincolnshire County Council) https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/support-education/identifying-supporting-send/11
Pupil Exclusions	Concerns and complaints about the application of statutory exclusions procedures should be made as part of those procedures and as detailed

	in the relevant schools Behaviour Policy. Links to each schools website, where the policy is published, can be found via: www.uolat.co.uk
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff and former staff will be dealt with under the academy's relevant HR polices (Whistleblowing / Grievance).
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants should be aware that should this be the case, the outcome or sanction will not be disclosed as part of the complaints procedure.
Whistleblowing	A whistleblowing Policy is available for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. This can be found via the Trust's website: Whistleblowing Policy The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus
Non-parental complainants	(no child enrolled at the academy / no parental rights or parents/carers of a child no longer on roll at the academy), however we would still aim to handle these respectfully and expediently
Third-party suppliers	the provision of services on our premises by, which should be directed to the relevant third party.

4.0 Commitments of people involved in this policy

4.1 During the implementation of this policy, we will:

- ensure that this policy is made widely available, including to the parents of our pupils and learners and by publishing it on all academy websites
- always take the complainant and the content of their complaint seriously
- offer support to complainants in expressing their views, if needed
- conduct discussions in a courteous and professional manner
- ensure that all those involved in a matter can share their views as part of an investigation
- work objectively and make decisions which are based on evidence
- keep notes of conversations and make these available in an open manner if requested
- ensure that information about the complaint is treated in accordance with the GDPR and our relevant data protection policies
- be mindful of our values and obligations, including, but not limited to, those related to safeguarding and our duties under the Equalities Act 2010
- keep the complainant informed of what is going on, especially if there is likely to be any delay in the process.

4.2 In return, we ask that complainants

- follow the procedures outlined in this policy
- ask for assistance if any is needed to ensure that information is expressed clearly
- ensure that the details of the complaint are expressed as fully as possible
- clarify what they feel would put things right
- assist us by providing additional information promptly if it is requested
- conduct discussions in a courteous and professional manner
- refrain from talking to others about the complaint and from discussing the matter on any social media platform
- notify us as soon as possible if they decide to withdraw the complaint.

4.3 At all stages of this policy, a complainant may choose to be accompanied or supported by an independent person who is not a legal representative. This independent person may offer support to the complainant and help them to express their views. They should also abide by the commitments outlined in paragraph 4.2 above.

4.4 Any concern that a party has not acted in the spirit of these commitments should be referred to one of our Trust Governance Professionals. If complainants are found to have behaved inappropriately, we reserve the right to deem the complaint 'unreasonable' (see section 8).

4.5 Where a complaint relates to an individual member of staff, we will ensure that, as far as is reasonable, all information relating to the complaint is also made available to that individual at an appropriate time.

Individual members of staff are expected also to behave in a way that demonstrates the commitments outlined in paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2.

Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

5.0 Making a complaint

5.1 It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. UoLAT takes complaints and concerns seriously, making every effort to resolve as quickly as possible.

5.2 Complainants are urged to make their complaint as soon as possible after a specific incident, or as part of any series of events. Any complaints made after more than three months of the date of the incident, may not be considered, except in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances are those of which are of an especially serious nature, new evidence has come to light, or the complainant can provide reasonable justification as to why it has not been raised previously

5.3 In accordance with equality legislation, the Trust will consider making reasonable adjustments where required to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. This may include providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a complaint, or holding meetings in accessible locations.

5.4 If another organisation or body is investigating matters relevant to the complaint, including the Police, Local Authority Safeguarding Team, courts, tribunals or regulatory bodies, the Trust may suspend, defer or discontinue the complaints procedure where this is considered appropriate. The complainant will be informed if this is necessary. Where legal proceedings have commenced in relation to the subject matter of the complaint, the Trust may determine that the complaints procedure should be suspended or discontinued.

5.5 Informal complaints (Stage 1) may be raised with any member of staff; who will seek to resolve this as soon as possible.

5.6 If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, please contact a member of the schools administrative team, who will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, a member of the Senior Leadership Team will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

5.7 The Trust has put in place a 3-stage process for managing complaints, the procedure for this is at section 6 of this Policy.

5.8 It is the Trust's expectation that most complaints will be resolved within Stage 1, informal resolution (full details on Stage 1 can be found at section xxx of this Policy).

5.9 We encourage parents/carers when writing concerns or complaints to do so in their own words rather than relying heavily on AI. This is because AI generated letters often include irrelevant legal jargon and potentially inaccurate statements, things which can slow down investigations and undermine the authenticity of both personal experience and our response time.

5.10 The mechanisms for escalating complaints to Stages 2 and 3 are outlined in sections 6.4 and 6.5 of this Policy.

5.11 A complainant may withdraw their complaint at any stage of the process. Where a complaint is withdrawn, the Trust will request confirmation in writing and retain a record of the complaint and the withdrawal.

5.12 **Anonymous complaints:**

5.12.1 The Trust will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. Anonymous complaints will however be reviewed by the Principal, or Chair of Governors, to determine if the complaint does warrant an investigation.

5.13 **Where to direct complaints**

5.13.1 Complaints may be made via telephone, in writing, or via email. This may be to a member of administrative staff, a class teacher, Head of Year/Department, or any of the school's leadership team (including the Principal). Full details of who to contact at each stage of the complaints process can be found at sections 5.12 to 5.14 of this Policy.

5.13.2 There are exceptions to this. Where complaints/concerns are expressed about certain individuals/group of individuals, at Stage 1, these should be directed as detailed below:

5.13.3 The person who receives the complaint below can delegate to another employee at University of Lincoln Academy Trust to investigate the complaint.

Exception	Who to contact
School leadership team	The school's Principal, via the School Business Manager/Personal Assistant to the Principal (Contact details can be found at section 5.13 of this Policy)
School Principal	The CEO, via the Trust's Governance Professional - enquiries@uolat.co.uk
Academy Monitoring Committee Members (Governor)	Chair of the Academy Governing Committee, via the relevant school's Clerk to AMC (Contact details can be found at section 5.13 of this Policy)
Chair of an Academy Monitoring Committee	The CEO, via the Trust's Governance Professional enquiries@uolat.co.uk
Trust Central Leadership Team or Trust Executive Leadership Team	The CEO, via the Trust's Governance Professional enquiries@uolat.co.uk
Chief Executive Officer	The Chair of Trustees, via the Trust's Governance Professional enquiries@uolat.co.uk
Trustees	The Chair of Trustees, via the Trust's Governance Professional enquiries@uolat.co.uk
Chair of Trustees	The Vice Chair of the Trust, via the Trust's Governance Professional enquiries@uolat.co.uk
Complaints about the Trust	The CEO, via the Trust's Governance Professional - enquiries@uolat.co.uk

5.13.4 Complaints concerning the Trust, the Chief Executive Officer, Trustees or the Chair of Trustees will follow the same staged process outlined in Section 6, with the individuals identified above assuming responsibility for the relevant stage of the procedure.

5.14 School Contact Details

The sections below provide details on who to contact at each school, at each stage of the complaints process; note the exceptions as stated at section 5.12.3 above.

University Academy Holbeach

Stage 1: Informal Complaint	Any member of staff
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	Mrs Jenny Brassington (Principal) University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU enquiries@uah.org.uk
Stage 3: Panel Hearing	Governance Professional & Trust Administrator University of Lincoln Academy Trust, University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU enquiries@uolat.co.uk

Holbeach Primary Academy

Stage 1: Informal Complaint	Any member of staff
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	Miss Nicola Kenyon (Principal) Holbeach Primary Academy, Boston Road South, Holbeach PE12 7LZ
Stage 3: Panel Hearing	Governance Professional & Trust Administrator University of Lincoln Academy Trust, University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU enquiries@uolat.co.uk

Gosberton House Academy

Stage 1: Informal Complaint	Any member of staff
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	Miss Katharine Saywell (Principal) Gosberton House Academy, 11 Westhorpe Road, Gosberton PE11 4EW

	enquiries@gosberton-house.lincs.sch.uk
Stage 3: Panel Hearing	Governance Professional & Trust Administrator University of Lincoln Academy Trust, University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU enquiries@uolat.co.uk

Holbeach Bank Academy

Stage 1: Informal Complaint	Any member of staff
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	Miss Kerryann Cunningham (Principal) Holbeach Bank Academy, 2003 Roman Bank, Holbeach Bank PE12 8BX enquiries@holbeachbankacademy.co.uk
Stage 3: Panel Hearing	Governance Professional & Trust Administrator University of Lincoln Academy Trust, University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU enquiries@uolat.co.uk

University Academy Long Sutton

Stage 1: Informal Complaint	Any member of staff
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	Mr Sher Alam (Principal) University Academy Long Sutton, 84 Little London, Long Sutton PE12 9LF enquiries@uals.org.uk
Stage 3: Panel Hearing	Governance Professional & Trust Administrator University of Lincoln Academy Trust, University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU enquiries@uolat.co.uk 01406 423 042

Monkshouse Primary Academy

Stage 1: Informal Complaint	Any member of staff
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	Mr Andy Clarke (Principal) Monkshouse Primary Academy, Pennygate, Spalding PE11 1LG
Stage 3: Panel Hearing	Governance Professional & Trust Administrator University of Lincoln Academy Trust, University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU enquiries@uolat.co.uk

Wrangle Primary Academy

Stage 1: Informal Complaint	Any member of staff
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	Mrs Tiffany Hebron (Principal) Wrangle Primary Academy, Main Road, Wrangle, Boston PE22 9AS enquiries@wpacademy.uk
Stage 3: Panel Hearing	Governance Professional & Trust Administrator University of Lincoln Academy Trust, University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU enquiries@uolat.co.uk

5.15 Resolving Complaints

5.15.1 At any stage of the complaints process the Trust may seek to resolve a complaint through:

- An explanation.
- An acknowledgement that the issue could have been handled differently.
- An apology.
- An assurance that the issue will not recur.

- A review of procedures or practices.
- Any other action considered appropriate to resolve the complaint.

6.0 Complaints Procedure

6.1 The below procedure provides details on how to make a complaint at each stage.

6.1.1 Complaints received during school holidays, closure periods or INSET days will be deemed received on the next school day unless otherwise stated within this policy.

6.2 For the avoidance of doubt the following has been clarified:

- School Days: Days in which students attend.
- School operating times: 08:30 - 16:00, Monday - Friday
- Time frames:
  - Day of receipt is day one; if this is a school day then this will be treated as day one (unless received after 16:00, then the next school day will be considered as day 1. If received during the school holidays, or any teacher training (INSET) days, then day one will be treated as the first day pupils' return.
  - Where an action is to be completed within a certain period, the last day will be considered the deadline. For example, where an acknowledgement must be sent within 5 school days, the fifth day (day 5) will be considered as the last date it can be sent, to comply with this policy.

6.3 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

6.3.1 It is hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

A complainant should contact a member of staff at the academy – this may be the administration staff, class teacher, a tutor, Head of Year/House, Head of Department/Faculty or a member of the academy's Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

6.3.2 If the complaint is made in person or by telephone, the member of staff receiving the complaint will note the details of the complaint in a similar format to the form at the back of this policy and this will be passed on to a more senior or appropriate member of staff, this member of staff will ensure that the complaint is acknowledged within five working days by telephone. It would be unlikely that the Principal / Head teacher would handle a complaint at this point, complaints would only be passed to a Principal / Head teacher at the point the member of staff handling the complaint feels they have exhausted means of reaching a reasonable resolution.

6.3.3 If the complaint is received in writing or via email, the member of staff receiving the complaint may pass it to a more senior or appropriate colleague within the academy / trust. This member of staff will ensure that the complaint is acknowledged in writing within five working days of its receipt.

6.3.4 The aim of stage 1 of this policy is to arrive at a resolution with which the complainant is satisfied relatively swiftly. In some cases, we will be able to offer a solution without further discussion and, if a complainant is satisfied with this, they may choose to withdraw or close the complaint at that stage.

6.3.5 If this complaint is more complex, academy staff may choose to convene up to two meetings with the complainant and, possibly, other people (including members of the academy's SLT), to discuss how a satisfactory resolution may be achieved.

If dates for meetings cannot be accommodated within this period, a timeframe for response can be extended, but no more than a further 10 school days.

6.3.6 Such meetings will seek to establish what happened to prompt the complaint and what remedy the complainant is seeking.

6.3.7 A member of staff at the meetings will keep a record of the discussions, which may be used at later stages of the procedure if necessary. During such meetings, any acknowledgement that the academy could have handled things better will not be taken as an admission of unlawful or negligent action.

6.3.8 Stage 1 may also involve telephone calls being made between parties – again, records will be kept of these calls by academy staff.

6.3.9 The outcome of stage 1 will be communicated in writing to the complainant by the member of staff who has dealt with it no later than fifteen working days after the complaint was received. In very exceptional circumstances, stage 1 may take longer than this and, if this is the case, academy staff will ensure that the complainant is aware of any revised timescales.

6.3.10 When the outcome is communicated to the complainant, we will also advise them of their right to progress to a more senior member of staff within the academy or in circumstances where it has reached the most senior member of staff (Head teacher / Principal) progress to stage 2 of this policy if they are unsatisfied with the resolution proposed and ensure that the timescales for doing this are clear.

6.4 Stage 2: Formal Complaint

6.4.1 Other than in exceptional circumstances, a complaint may only proceed to stage 2 if stage 1 has been exhausted and the complainant remains unsatisfied.
Stage 2 complaints must not include any new complaint, beyond what was included within Stage 1; any new complaint will be directed to Stage 1.

6.4.2 To trigger stage 2, a complainant should write (by post or via email) to the academy Principal (or, if appropriate, to one of the people specified in paragraph 5.2), detailing clearly the reasons why they remain unsatisfied after stage 1.

In very exceptional circumstances, the Principal may deem it is acceptable for this communication to be made in person or by telephone. This communication must be received by the Principal within ten working days of the communication of the stage 1 outcome to the complainant. The Trust considers receipt by the complainant, as 2 working days after being sent.

6.4.3 The Principal will acknowledge receipt of the complaint at stage 2 to the complainant in writing within five working days and advise the complainant of the steps they intend to take.

6.4.4 Stage 2 requires a formal investigation to take place, which will be led by a Principal or a senior leader from the Academy Senior Leadership team or a Senior Leader from another Academy within the trust or an appropriate senior leader from the trust team.

6.4.5 The appointed investigator will not have been involved at Stage 1

6.4.6 The investigation will be thorough and seek to establish all the evidence in relation to the complaint being made. It is likely to include the person leading the investigation's interviewing, or meeting with, the complainant and other people involved in the complaint, and may involve asking people to make written statements. In all cases, records will be kept of all discussions, and the person leading the investigation will keep the complainant informed of progress as far as can be deemed reasonable.

6.4.7 The person leading the investigation will establish any recommendations for resolving the complaint and agree how these will be implemented. They will then include these actions in a short-written report, which will be communicated to the complainant as the conclusion of stage 2.

6.4.8 As part of this communication, the person leading the investigation will offer to meet again (in-person, virtually or via telephone) with the complainant to establish whether they are satisfied with the outcome.

6.4.9 The person leading the investigation will communicate the outcome of stage 2 to the complainant no later than fifteen working days after receipt of the initial indication that the complainant wished to proceed to stage 2. In very exceptional circumstances, stage 2 may take longer than this and, if this is the case, the person leading the investigation will ensure that the complainant is aware of any revised timescales.

6.4.10 When the outcome is communicated to the complainant, the person leading the investigation will also advise them of their right to progress to stage 3 of this policy if they are unsatisfied with the resolution proposed and ensure that the timescales for doing this are clear.

6.5 Stage 3: Appeal (Panel Hearing)

6.5.1 A complaint may only progress to stage 3 if stage 2 has been exhausted and the complainant remains unsatisfied.
Stage 3 complaints must not include any new complaint beyond what was included within Stages 1 and 2; any new complaint will need to be considered from Stage 1. The purpose of Stage 3 is to allow the Complainant to appeal the outcome provided at Stage 2. The Panel will review all evidence considered at Stages 1 and 2. They will then determine if they agree with the outcomes at Stage 2.

6.5.2 To trigger stage 3, a complainant should write to our Governance Professional (via email at enquiries@uolat.co.uk by post University of Lincoln Academy Trust, University Academy Holbeach, Park Road, Holbeach, PE12 7PU) detailing clearly the reasons why they remain unsatisfied after stage 2. In very exceptional circumstances, the Governance Professional may deem it acceptable for this communication to be made in person or by telephone. This communication must be received by the Governance Professional within five working days of the communication of the stage 2 outcome to the complainant. As noted in section 6.2, day of receipt is considered as 2 school days after it has been sent by the school.

6.5.3 The Trust Governance Professional will acknowledge receipt of the complaint to the complainant in writing within five working days and advise the complainant of the next steps, which will be in line with this policy.

6.5.4 The Trust Governance Professional will first seek to assure themselves that all possible avenues of resolution at stages 1 and 2 have been explored and that the stages 1 and 2 procedures have been properly followed. This may involve meetings or telephone conversations with the complainant or with the academy's staff, and records of these conversations will be kept.

6.5.5 If the Trust Governance Professional is not satisfied that the procedures have been properly followed, they may propose an informal resolution to the complainant. If the complainant is happy with the proposed

resolution, they may choose to withdraw or close the complaint. If they remain unsatisfied, then the Trust Governance Professional will convene a complaints panel as described in paragraph 6.5.6 below.

6.5.6 If the Trust Governance Professional is satisfied that the procedures have been properly followed, they will convene a complaints panel. A complaints panel will consist of three people, none of whom have had prior involvement with the complaint.

At least one member of the panel will be completely independent from the leadership and management of the academy (or trust as appropriate) to which the complaint refers, and this person will chair the complaints panel. Most often, a complaints panel will consist of two members of the AMC for the academy to which the complaint refers and one member of an AMC from another Trust academy.

Panel members may therefore include trustees, AMC members, leaders from another Trust school or a person entirely independent of the Trust.

6.5.7 The complaints panel will meet to consider the case no later than twenty five working days after receipt of the complainant's confirmed indication that they wish to proceed to stage 3.
The Trust Governance Professional will notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting of the complaints panel at least five working days ahead of its meeting. The venue will normally be the Academy to which the complaint relates. Notice will be no later than 10 school days after the school acknowledged the request to escalate to Stage 3. The Trust will aim to hold the Panel Hearing at one of its Schools, its central offices, or at a suitable local location.

6.5.8 The Trust Governance Professional will ensure that the Chair of the complaints panel is provided in good time with all records relating to the complaint as it was dealt with at stage 1 and 2. They may also request further information from the Principal of the Academy to which the complaint relates. All information presented to the complaints panel will also be made available to the complainant ahead of its meeting.

6.5.9 The complainant should make every effort to attend the complaints panel so that their views may be heard in person. If they are unable to attend, they may make a written submission to the complaints panel which must be received by the Trust Governance Professional at least three working days before the panel meets. The complaints panel will proceed regardless of whether the complainant is able to attend.

If for any reason the Complainant does not find the time/date/location set for the Hearing, suitable, a further proposal will be made.

6.5.10 The Principal of the Academy to which the complaint relates will also be asked to attend the complaints panel. They may choose to invite the attendance of another member of the academy's SLT or a member of staff who knows the details of the complaint well.

6.5.11 If the complainant is invited to attend the panel, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate; this would be discussed should an occurrence arise before the meeting so that all parties are aware.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

6.5.12 The Chair of the complaints panel will ensure that the meeting is held in as productive a way as possible and will ensure that all parties can speak without interruption and are treated in a courteous manner. The Chair will also ensure that the panel meeting is accurately clerked and minuted.

6.5.13 The complaints panel will be independent and impartial. The aim of the panel is to achieve a reasonable resolution and, ultimately, attain reconciliation between the complainant and the Academy involved. This is not always achievable, though, and it may only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations to reassure the complainant that their case has been taken seriously.

6.5.14 The complaints panel will consider all the information available about the complaint, including:

- a summary of the details of the complaint, including any submissions at Stages 1 & 2
- the views of the complainant
- the views of the Academy representative.

The complaints panel may choose to deliberate without the presence of the complainant and the academy's representative and will then come to a conclusion.

The Complainant and the school Principal may wish to add further information; this is to be submitted to the Trust's central office no later than 7 school days before the Hearing. All information will be collated and

an agenda will be compiled, these will be sent to all parties; The Panel, Complainant and the relevant school's Principal, no later than 5 school days before the Hearing.

6.5.15 The complaints panel may decide, as its conclusion, to:

- dismiss or uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- decide on appropriate action to be taken
- recommend changes that the Academy can make to prevent reoccurrence of the problem

6.5.16 The Trust Governance Professional will ensure that the minutes (minutes will not be verbatim) of the complaints panel, along with a letter summarising the outcome, is sent to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about within ten working days of the panel meeting. The minutes of the complaints panel and letter summarising the outcome will be available for inspection on the school premise by the Trust, Academy Monitoring Committee and Principal. Furthermore, they will also advise them of their right to further appeal (as detailed in paragraph 6.6 below) if they remain unsatisfied.

Hearings will not normally be recorded. Requests to record proceedings as a reasonable adjustment will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Covert recordings will not normally be accepted as evidence unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend complaint hearings.

6.6 Appeal beyond the Trust to the Department for Education:

6.6.1 If a complainant has exhausted our complaints procedure (Stages 1-3), they will be advised by the Trust Governance Professional that they may submit a complaint to the Department for Education (DfE) using their online form or by post.
The DfE is contactable by https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school.

6.6.2 The DfE will not overturn a stage 3 decision about a complaint, but may ask us to reconsider the complaint if it deems

- there was undue delay, or we did not comply with this complaints policy
- we are in breach of our funding agreement with the Secretary of State
- we have failed to comply with any other educational / legal obligation
- Acted reasonably in carrying out its functions

7.0 Record Keeping, availability for inspection and data protection:

7.1 We maintain a record of all complaints, regardless of the stage at which the complaint was resolved. This record includes details of the complaint and the complainant, copies of all correspondence and notes and details of the recommendations made. This information will also be provided to complainants at every stage. The record will include information about how, and at what stage, the complaint was resolved.
These records will be kept securely within our academies and Academy leaders will make them available to the Secretary of State or Ofsted inspectors on academy premises if requested.
Complainants have a right to request access to any of these records at any time in accordance with our Data Protection policy, which is available on our website.
Where complaints have reached a stage that requires disclosing information to a third party, written consent will be sought from the complainant.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where:

- Access is requested by the Secretary of State.
- Access is requested by Ofsted.
- Access is requested by the ESFA
- Disclosure is otherwise required by law.

7.2 Records relating to complaints will be retained in accordance with the Trust's Records Retention Schedule and Data Protection Policy.

8.0 Unreasonable complaints and complainants

8.1 We define ‘unreasonable complaints’ as:

Those complaints where it is readily apparent that the content of the complaint is entirely without merit or that the complaint is being made solely for the intention of causing inconvenience, harassment or expense.

We define 'unreasonable complainants' as:

Those complainants who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the Trust, hinder our ability to give due consideration to the wellbeing, views or concerns of others.

8.2 We may view a complaint or a complainant as unreasonable if:

- a complainant refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- a complainant refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
- a complainant refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure
- a complainant insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice
- a complainant introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be considered and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but not directly relevant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- a complainant makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced
- a complainant changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- a complainant repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- a complainant refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where this complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the ESFA
- a complainant seeks an unrealistic outcome
- a complainant makes excessive demands on academy time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with a complainant does not comply with the commitments outlined in paragraph 4.2.

8.3 A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically

- maliciously
- Aggressively
- using threats, intimidation or violence
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language
- knowing it to be false
- alongside a 'campaign' against the Trust or the academy using, for example, social media platforms
- using falsified information

This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

8.4 An academy Principal (or more senior member of staff) can decide that a complaint or complainant is deemed 'unreasonable'. This will normally only happen after the complainant has been invited to speak with the Principal and encouraged to change their behaviour.

8.5 If a complaint is deemed 'unreasonable', the academy Principal (or more senior member of staff) will write to the complainant advising them that the complaint will not be considered.

8.6 If a complainant is deemed 'unreasonable', the academy Principal (or more senior member of staff) will write to the complainant explaining that they have been designated 'unreasonable'. This may have consequences for their general engagement with the academy, for example:

- meetings with the complainant may always have to have two members of staff present and be recorded
- all communication from the complainant may have to be in writing
- the complainant may be barred from the academy premises
- we may seek advice from our legal advisers regarding behaviour which constitutes harassment

- we may consider referring the complainant's behaviour to the police.

8.7 Any designation of a complainant as 'unreasonable' will be reviewed by the academy Principal (or more senior member of staff) every six months and any change in status will be communicated to the complainant in writing.

9.0 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier if deemed necessary.

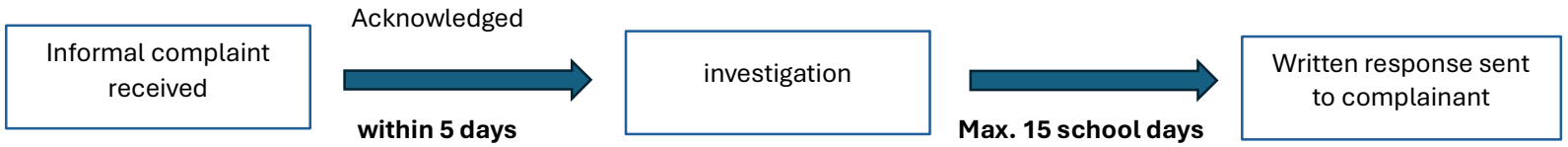
Complaint form

Please complete and return to the relevant person, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:	**Date:**
Pupil's name (if relevant):	
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):	
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:** **Email address:**	
Details: **What solution are you hoping for?**	

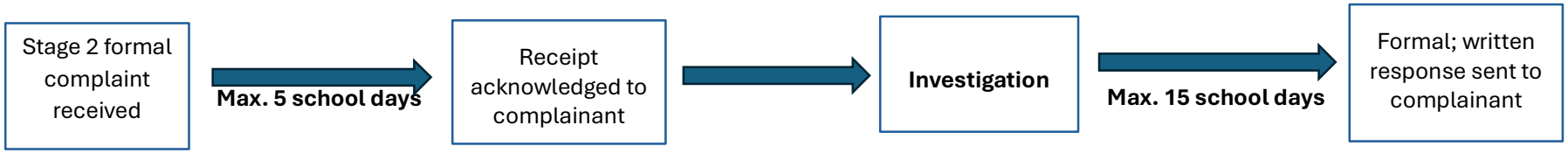
Complaint flow chart

Stage 1: Informal complaint



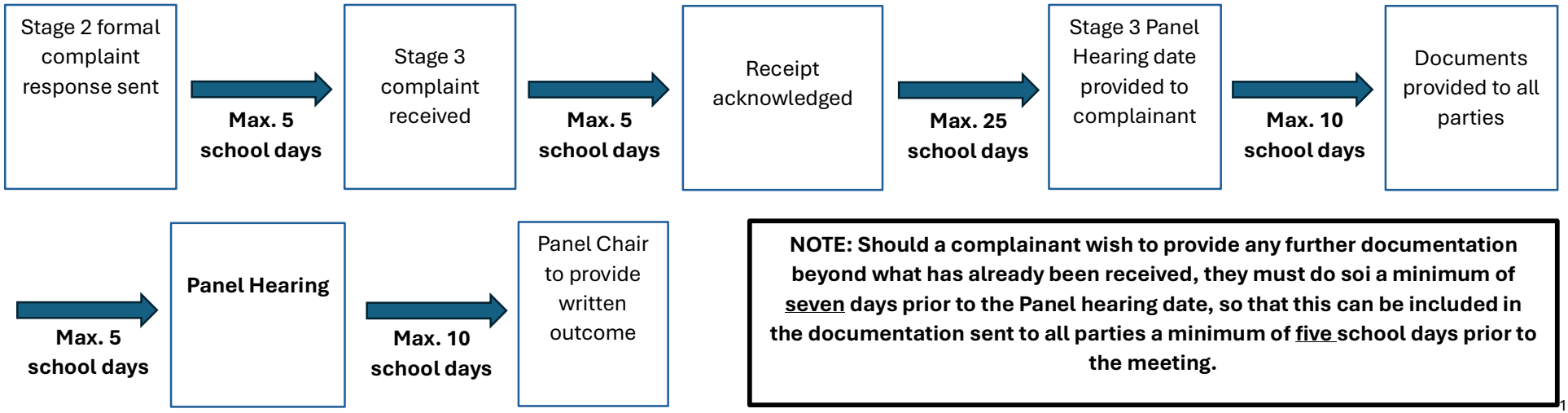
Stage 2: Formal complaint

Should a complaint be unhappy with the response received when addressed informally, they may submit a Stage 2 Formal Complaint within 10 school days



Stage 3: Panel Hearing

Should a complainant be unhappy with the response received when addressed formally at stage 2, they may submit a stage 3 complaint, where it will be considered by a Panel. These requests must be received within 5 school days of the stage 2 formal complaint response.



Version Control

Version	Author(s)	Approval date	Approving body	Changes
2.0	Human Resources	14.10.2026	Board of Trustees	• Clarifies the policy's scope, responsibilities, and complaint routes. • Introduces detailed governance arrangements and complaint handling standards. • Strengthens requirements for record keeping and data protection. • Adds a procedure for managing unreasonable complaints and complainants. • Enhances timescales and escalation requirements across all stages of the complaints process. • Updates academy contact details. • Aligns external escalation guidance with current Department for Education (DfE) requirements.