



Royal Wootton Bassett Academy Trust Complaints Procedure

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RWBAT Responsibility: MAT LT

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This policy/procedure has been adopted for use by North Wiltshire SCITT.

Relevant Legislation:

Freedom of Information
GDPR

Related Policies:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Exclusions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- SEN policy and information report

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1. Aims

The Royal Wootton Bassett Academy Trust (RWBAT) aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from North Wiltshire SCITT (known as NWSCITT) trainees, and others.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into NWSCITT's improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

We will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

The qualities and values of Compassion, Respect and Ambition are those which are essential in RWBAT. To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the trust & NWSCITT website.

2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 29 of the [Education Act 2002](#), which states that schools must have and make available a procedure to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community, facilities or services that the school provides.

It is also based on [guidance for schools on complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of pupils at the school (in relation to NWSCITT, this refers to "trainees").

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations](#), and refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

This document meets the requirements of section 35 of the schedule to [the Education \(Non-Maintained Special Schools\) \(England\) Regulations 2011](#), which states that non-maintained special schools must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints relating to their school/NWSCITT.

It also refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

3. Definitions and scope

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”.

NWSCITT will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

NWSCITT intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Exclusion
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use NWSCITT premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

4. Principles for investigation

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

We also intend to address complaints as quickly as possible. To achieve this, realistic and reasonable time limits will be set for each action within each stage.

Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits will be set, and the complainant will be sent details of the new deadline with an explanation for the delay.

NWSCITT expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 3 months afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

5. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Programme Manager, Accounting Officer or Management Board member)

Stage 1: informal

NWSCITT will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Programme Manager, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the NWSCITT office.

NWSCITT will acknowledge informal complaints usually within 24 hours (with the exception of weekends), and investigate and aim to provide a response within 10 working days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the appropriate member of staff. Should a complaint be made against a member of staff within the Partnership schools, the Headteacher will also be interviewed.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint into writing to the Programme Manager and/or the subject of the complaint. This letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The Programme Manager (or other person appointed by the Programme Manager for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. Should a complaint be made against a member of staff within the Partnership schools, the Headteacher will also be interviewed. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant, usually within 15 working days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the NWSCITT Management Board in writing within 10 days.

Stage 3: review panel

Complaints will be escalated to the Management Board panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

Complaints will be escalated to the Management Board panel hearing stage if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from NWSCITT/Partnership School, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the NWSCITT / Partnership School representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and NWSCITT / Partnership School representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and Programme Manager.

NWSCITT will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 days.

Stage 4: CEO

The complainant may take their complaint to the Chief Executive Officer of the RWBAT or if the complaint is made against the Programme Manager, Accounting Officer or Management Board member can take this as the first formal meeting (follow procedure for Stage 2)

Stage 5: Trust Board Directors Panel

If the complainant is not happy with Stage 4 or if the complaint is against the Programme Manager or Management Board then Stage 5 will be followed (Trust Board to follow procedure in Stage 3).

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the CEO and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the management and running of NWSCITT. The panel cannot be made up solely of Trust board members, as they are not independent of the management and running of the Trust.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress. The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from NWSCITT/the school, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the NWSCITT/school representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and NWSCITT/school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the proprietor and Programme Manager/CEO.

NWSCITT will inform those involved of the decision in writing within 5 days.

6. Complaints against the Programme Manager

Complaints made against the Programme Manager should be directed to the Accounting Officer.

Where a complaint is against the Accounting Officer or any member of the Management board, it should be made in writing to the CEO in the first instance. Where a complaint is against the CEO it should be made in writing to the Chair of the Trust Board.

7. Referring complaints on completion of NWSCITT's procedure

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the Trust's complaints procedure, they can refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The OIA will check whether the complaint has been dealt with properly by NWSCITT. The OIA will not overturn a school's decision about a complaint. However, it will look into:

- Whether there was undue delay, or the school did not comply with its own complaints procedure
- Whether the Trust/NWSCITT was in breach of its funding agreement with the secretary of state
- Whether the Trust/NWSCITT has failed to comply with any other legal obligation

If NWSCITT did not deal with the complaint properly, it will be asked to re-investigate the complaint. If NWSCITT's complaints procedure is found to not meet regulations, the trust will be asked to correct its procedure accordingly.

8. Persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open the issue with NWSCITT after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and NWSCITT has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Accounting Officer (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts NWSCITT again about the same issue, NWSCITT can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- NWSCITT has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of NWSCITT 's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting NWSCITT repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

However, this list is not intended to be exhaustive.

NWSCITT will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting NWSCITT with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, *and/or*
- The individual's letters/emails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, *and/or*
- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, school staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening may constitute an unreasonably persistent complaint.

Once NWSCITT has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

NWSCITT will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the school acts reasonably.

9. Record-keeping

NWSCITT will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or where the material must be made available during a school inspection.

Records of complaints will be kept for 7 years.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will not be shared with the whole Management/Trust board in case a review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the Management/Trust board is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, we will (where reasonably practicable) arrange for an independent panel to hear the complaint.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Management/Trust Board, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

10. Learning lessons

The Chair of the Trust Board will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the Programme Manager/CEO, where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, to determine whether there are any improvements that the school can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

11. Monitoring arrangements

The Trust Board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. The Trust Board will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 10.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the NWSCITT Administrator.

This policy will be reviewed by Trust Leadership Team bi-annually.

At each review, the policy will be approved by Trust Board.