

Complaints Policy and Procedure Document

Policy reviewed October 2023

Next review September 2026 or earlier

1. Introduction

It is in everyone's interest that complaints about OTT SCITT are resolved at the earliest possible stage. The experience of the first contact between the complainant and OTT SCITT can be crucial in determining whether the complaint will escalate. To that end, we must be clear about the procedures we will apply when we receive a complaint.

This policy has been developed using the River Learning Trust complaints policy, with minor adaptations to fit SCITT use, rather than school use. The River Learning Trust is governed by a Board of Directors who are responsible for, and oversee, the management and administration of schools within the Trust. The River Learning Trust appoint a Board of Governors, including elected parent governors, to whom is delegated responsibility for oversight and management of the school/s. Governors of schools within the River Learning Trust have adopted the following procedure to deal with formal complaints from members of the school community or general public about appropriate matters relevant to the running of the school. This procedure is to be used only when informal attempts to resolve problems have been unsuccessful.

2. Framework of Principles

This procedure is designed to:

- be well publicised and easily accessible
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a fair investigation by an independent person, where necessary
- allow for a hearing of a panel of Governors, where appropriate
- respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible
- address all points of issue, provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- provide information to OTT SCITT's central leadership team so that services can be improved

3. Initial concerns

We need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints. The underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures.

In most cases the Programme Leaders will receive the first approach. If the concern is not handled to the satisfaction of the person who has raised the issue, then the SCITT Director or SCITT Manager can be contacted.

4. Making a Formal Complaint

4.1 Stage 1

Where informal attempts have been unsuccessful in resolving a complaint, the matter will be formally investigated by an appropriate person from OTT SCITT.

If the matter is about an application, the matter should be investigated by the Director or a member of senior staff appointed by the Director.

If the matter is about the day-to-day running of the SCITT or the interpretation of policies by members of the central team or the actions or inactions of the central team, the matter should be investigated by the Director or a member of senior staff nominated by the Director.

If the matter is about SCITT policies as determined by the Governing Body or the actions or inactions of the Governing Body, then the matter should be dealt with by the Chair of Governors or Governor nominated by the Chair.

A complainant wishing to instigate the formal procedure should be asked to complete a complaint form (*Annex 1*). OTT SCITT should offer to help an individual to complete the form and the person providing this help should be unconnected with the complaint. It is essential to report the progress of any complaint and the final outcome. It is necessary that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint (the designated person) makes sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning; keep notes of the interview.

4.2 Resolving the Complaint

At each stage in the procedure, we will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint

It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that OTT SCITT could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence. Equally, an effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues. If OTT SCITT rejects the complaint, it is important to reassure the complainant that the matter has been thoroughly investigated.

4.3 Stage 2

Where the complainant is still not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with fully and properly, they may choose to take it to a second stage. This stage will be referred to a panel of Governors established as outlined in *Annex 2*. The Chair of the Panel will be elected by the Panel members and will be responsible for maintaining a further procedure as outlined in *Annex 2*.

4.4 Timescale

Complaints need to be considered and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints process must have realistic time limits for each action within each stage, and this will be communicated to the complainant. Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

5. Mediation

If, at any time, throughout the procedure from informal to the final decision of the Panel, OTT SCITT feels that mediation would help resolve the complaint, this can be arranged. By agreement the mediator can be a member

of the Governing Body (for complaints not relating to the actions / inactions of the Governing Body) or the Trust Board (for complaints not relating to the actions / inactions of the Governing Body).

6. Monitoring Complaints

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints would contribute to SCITT improvements. When individual complaints are heard, OTT SCITT may identify issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the SCITT and Governing Body can be useful to evaluating the SCITT's performance. Any discussion of complaints by the Governing Body or others in the SCITT community should not name or be able to identify individuals.

7. Policy for Unreasonable Complainants

The River Learning Trust is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the SCITT. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The River Learning Trust defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the SCITT, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where OTT SCITT's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school 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 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;
- using falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as social media websites and newspapers.

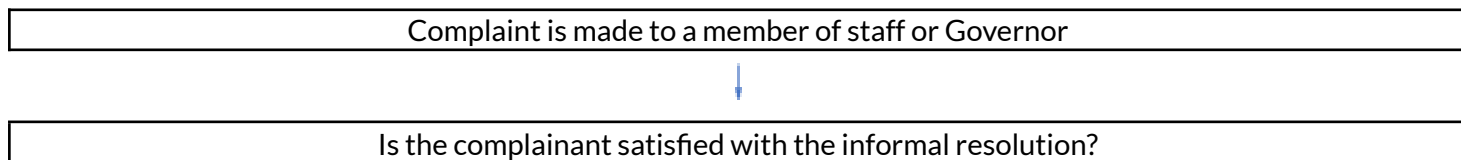
Complainants should limit the number of communications with OTT SCITT while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Director or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues the Director will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the SCITT causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed.

Flow chart of complaint stages

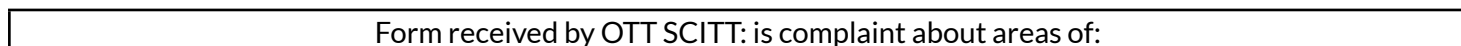
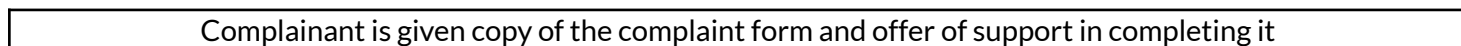
INFORMAL



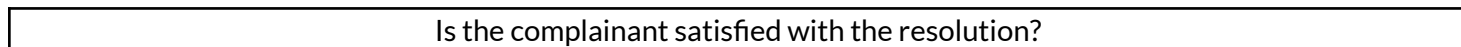
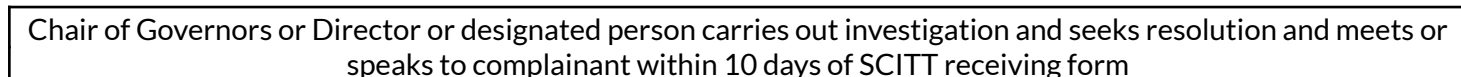
No

Yes

STAGE 1



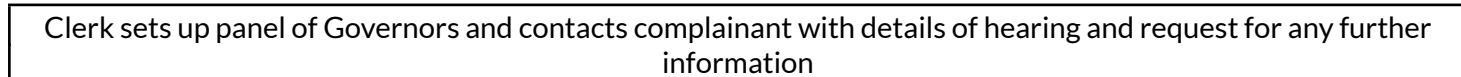
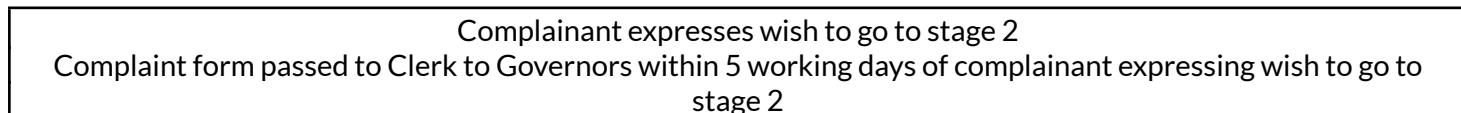
Director's responsibility	Governors' responsibility
Director deals with matter or designates senior member of staff	Chair of Governors deals with matter or designates Governor



No

Yes

STAGE 2



Panel meets within 15 working days of Clerk receiving form and makes decisions

AT ANY STAGE MEDIATION MAY BE CONSIDERED

Annex 1: The River Learning Trust Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the SCITT office in an envelope marked for the attention of the Director or Clerk to the Governors. The Director or Clark of Governors will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:

Address:

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..... Postcode:

Daytime telephone number: Evening telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

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What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)

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Your relationship to OTT SCITT, e.g. applicant, Associate Teacher, Mentor, Senior Link, colleague at placement school, neighbour, member of public:

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What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

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Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:

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Signature: Date:

Official Use:

Date Complaint Received: Date of acknowledgement sent:

By Whom: Complaint referred to:

Outcome:

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Annex 2: Establishing a complaints panel

The Clerk to the Governors will make arrangements for the complaints panel to be appointed. The panel will consist of three members, one of whom must be independent of the management and running of the SCITT. This person may be a governor from another LGB in the Trust.

When the clerk of governors receives a copy of the complaint form he/she will inform the governing body that a complaint has been received and that it has been passed to the panel to deal with. No further information about the complaint should be shared with other governors.

There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- It is important that the complaint panel is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor.
- The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
- The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.
- The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

Checklist for a Panel Hearing:

- The panel needs to take the following points into account:
- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- A designated person from the panel may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Director or a designated person is then invited to explain the SCITT's actions and be followed by the SCITT's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Director or designated person and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Director or designated person is then invited to sum up the SCITT's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within five working days.