

UTC South Durham

Complaints Policy



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Approved by	Governing Body
Signed: (Principal) 	Date: 5 June 2026
Signed: (Chair of Governors) 	Date: 5 June 2026

Date to be reviewed by	June 2027
Review History	Reviewed – Vanessa Stobart April 23 Reviewed – Catherine Purvis-Mawson May 2024 Reviewed – Catherine Purvis-Mawson November 2025 Reviewed – Tom Dower May 26
Responsibility	Deputy Principal

1. Introduction

This policy is based on guidance for dealing with school complaints issued by the Department for Education in March 2021.

Academies and University Technical Colleges (UTCs) are required to have complaints procedures meeting certain requirements by the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 and to make the procedure available to parents of students and parents of prospective students.

The UTC accepts that the actions of those individuals who work in the UTC will and should be open to comment, question and, on occasions, criticism. UTC South Durham takes complaints seriously and strives to deal with complaints swiftly and thoroughly. In a spirit of accountability UTC South Durham will attempt to resolve general UTC complaints through the most appropriate process and, where necessary, this may involve formal procedures.

This general UTC Complaints Policy does not cover every type of complaint. The issues noted below have their own, separate procedures.

- Exclusions
- Admissions and Appeals
- Statutory Assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- The National Curriculum and related matters, including Religious Education
- Child Protection, including allegations against staff (safeguarding concerns about staff that need to be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO))
- Whistle-blowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff discipline

Please note that there is a distinction between:

- A concern about the quality of an aspect of UTC provision
- A complaint
- An allegation against an adult working with children

In the case of an allegation, it may relate to somebody working with children who has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- Behaved in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.

This should be dealt with using the UTC South Durham Allegations against Staff Policy.

1. Principles

The Complaints Policy sets out to ensure that:

- The UTC listens and acts on complaints
- All complaints are investigated thoroughly, fairly and promptly
- Wherever possible, the UTC will find a resolution
- Complainants will not suffer because of a complaint

This policy is not intended to replace the normal discussions regarding problems and concerns which take place in the UTC on a day to day basis. It is only where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of such discussions that further steps may need to be taken.

2. Definition of Complaints

In most cases, concerns will be dealt with by staff before they reach the stage of a formal complaint. Where a complaint is made, it is helpful if staff record the steps taken to resolve the issues informally and to keep a note of discussions. However, it is recognised that staff do not want to discourage parents from voicing concerns by formally logging every issue raised.

3. Aims

The UTC gives careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them fairly and honestly. Sufficient opportunity will be provided for any complaint to be fully discussed with the aim of finding a resolution through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents.

4. Recording Keeping and Confidentiality

Complaints and concerns will be dealt with confidentially for all those involved, and we expect each complaint to also observe that same confidentiality. Complainants should not discuss the matters publicly on social media or group chat applications. Should they do so, this may delay resolution of the complaint and could potentially be prejudicial to the complaint.

The UTC 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.

5. Complaints Procedure

Most complaints are best dealt with informally.

If you have a child at the UTC and your concern is about the UTC or the education provided, please discuss the matter in the first instance with the students' class teacher, crew leader or Student Support team. If you do not have a child at the UTC please address the matter to the Deputy Principal.

5.1 Informal Complaint

If you feel that a concern has not been addressed through discussion with the relevant member of staff, or that the concern is of a sufficiently serious nature, please contact either a Vice or Deputy Principal. We consider any such complaint very seriously and most

complaints can be resolved at this stage. All communications and outcomes will be documented.

5.2 Stage 1 – Formal Complaint

- i. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, the complainant should put the complaint in writing using the attached form (Appendix 1) addressed to the Principal setting out briefly the facts and stating the justification that the complainant considers where the UTC has not met its obligations.
- ii. An investigation will be carried out by an independent member of the senior leadership team or a nominated person who can ensure fair understanding of the complaint. The scope of the investigation will be documented to ensure that all aspects are covered. The investigator will offer the complainant a meeting within 15 school days of the written complaint being received and will speak to others involved to ensure the complaint is fully understood and advise next steps. They will endeavour to work in a timely manner to resolve the complaint and will be clear if there are reasonable reasons for a delay.
- iii. The investigator will put their findings in writing and whenever reasonably possible, have this issued to the complainant within 15 school days of the meeting taken place.
- iv. Complaints that involve or are about the Principal should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees, via the UTC office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.
- v. Complaints about the Chair of Trustees, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the UTC office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

5.3 Stage 2 – Review by the Chair of Trustees

5.3.1 Notification

- i. If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the complaint under stage 1 of this Complaints Policy or if the complaint relates to the Principal or Deputy Principal, the complainant may write to the Clerk of Trustees within 10 school days of receiving the letter confirming the outcome of stage 1, asking for the complaint to be reviewed by the Chair of Trustees.
- ii. The complainant should not repeat matters raised in their original letter or attach documentation already provided but should clearly set out how and why the complainant does not accept the findings made under stage 1.
- iii. The Chair of Trustees will write within 15 school days of receipt of the complaint to advise the actions needed to either resolve the concern or identify further actions to have the complaint fully reviewed. In some cases, this may require a review to be conducted by either another Trustee (better equipped to understand the nature of the complaint) or involve a third part to ensure the complaint is fully evaluated depending upon the complaint matter.

5.3.2 Acknowledgement

The complainant's letter will be acknowledged within 5 school days of receipt. The acknowledgement letter will confirm the date that the formal complain was received, the action to be taken and the specified time limit.

5.3.3 Review

- i. The Chair of Trustees will be provided with all documentation relating to the complaint within 5 school days of receipt of the letter requesting a review under stage 2. This will include any records of any informal procedure (if applicable), the original letter of complaint or Complaint form, any documentation provided by the complainant with their complaint, all investigation records under stage 1, and the letter of outcome under stage 1.

- ii. The Chair of Trustees will review the documentation received and consider the matters raised in the complaint and the investigation carried out under stage 1. The Chair of Trustees will only speak to the persons involved in the matters raised to clarify any matters which were not confirmed during the stage 1 investigation, if believed necessary.
- iii. The Chair of Trustees may decide to deal with the matter themselves or may commission an external review of how the complaint will be handled.
- iv. If the Chair of Trustees deems it to be appropriate in relation to the matters raised, the complainant will be offered a meeting to discuss the issues raised. If a meeting is deemed appropriate, it will usually take place after the review has been completed with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable resolution.
- v. The time line to have this completed should be within 15 school days form the date agreed to take further investigation. However, if there is to be an independent person involved this timeline may extend to ensure the process is fully understood and to give the complaint due consideration.

5.4 Stage 3 – Submit the complaint to the Complaint Panel

- i. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the investigator, they may request that the complaint be considered by the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body The request must be in writing, addressed to the Clerk of Trustees, within 10 school days of the response from stage 2 being sent to the complainant and must set out briefly the reasons why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response.
- ii. A letter of acknowledgement will be sent to the complainant within 5 school days. Within 15 school days of receipt of the complainants letter the Clerk will convene a meeting of the complaints Panel of the Governing Body together with the complainant.
- iii. At any meeting, the complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend or family member but legal representation will not be allowed.
- iv. The panel will comprise of a minimum of 3 people; at least 2 will be trustees and which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the UTC. Members of the panel will be appointed on the basis that they have no prior knowledge of the complaint.
- v. The panel should be clear about the scope of their review, which is usually to review whether the Stage 2 complaint has been fairly conducted. It should make sure that those invited are able to answer all aspects of their review.
- vi. The meeting is not a court case and will be as informal as circumstances allow. The complainant will have the opportunity to put their reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but many not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The investigator will have the opportunity to clarify their conclusions and each side, as well as the Panel members, will be able to ask questions.
- vii. The Panel will make findings and recommendations and a copy of those will be sent by email or otherwise given to the complainant and, where appropriate, the Chair of Trustees and the Principal.
- viii. The Panel will formulate its response as quickly and as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 10 school days, and the Clerk to the Trustees will notify all concerned.
- ix. The Principal and Chair of Trustees will ensure that any recommendations from the panel are appropriately considered and that changes to policies are made if needed.
- x. A written record will be kept of all complaints, and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage of proceed to a panel hearing.
- xi. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 requests access to them.
- xii. The decision of the panel is final. If the complainant is still not satisfied, they may wish to put their complaint to the Department of Education.

6 Vexatious Complaints

UTC South Durham is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the UTC, however we do not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will act to protect staff from that harassing behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The following scenarios would normally be considered to be unacceptable and complaints may be dismissed as being vexatious, where the complainant:

- i. Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- ii. Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the Complaints Policy
- iii. Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be considered and commented on
- iv. Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- v. Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues or seeks to have them replaced
- vi. Uses this policy to complain about a matter which is not related to the UTC (e.g. a personally motivated complaint against a member of staff)
- vii. Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- viii. Makes excessive demands on UTC time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complain in person, in writing by email or telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- ix. Uses threats to intimidate
- x. Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- xi. Knowingly provides falsified information
- xii. Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the UTC that relates to their complaint while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay an outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Principal or Chair of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying a vexatious marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Principal will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact UTC South Durham causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan which will be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring the individual from UTC South Durham.

7. Unreasonably persistent complaints

If, despite all stages of the complaint procedure being followed the complainant tries to re-open the same issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this Complaints Policy, the Principal or Chair of Trustees may write to the complainant to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter closed, and that the continued

correspondence will be considered to be vexatious and that the UTC will not respond to any further correspondence on this issue or a closely related issue.

Should the complainant contact the UTC again on the same issue, this may be viewed as serial or persistent. In this situation the UTC may choose not to respond.

Persistent or serial complaints could be considered as:

- i. Complaints that are repetitious, obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific
- ii. Insistence upon pursuing complaints lacking value or merit (following previous concluded investigations) and/or
- iii. Insistence upon pursuing unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- iv. Refusal to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the UTC's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed
- v. Complaints demanding redress that lack any serious purpose of value
- vi. Insists on pursuing a complaint that is unfounded, or out of scope of the complaint's procedure, beyond all reason
- vii. Pursues a valid complaint, but in an unreasonable manner e.g. refuses to articulate the complaint, refuses to co-operate with this complaints produced, or insists that the complaint is deal with in ways that are incompatible with this procedure and the time frame it sets out
- viii. Makes a complaint designed to cause disruption, annoyance or excessive demands on UTC time
- ix. A complainant will not be marked as serial for exercising their right to refer their complaint to their MP, no matter which stage the complaint has reached

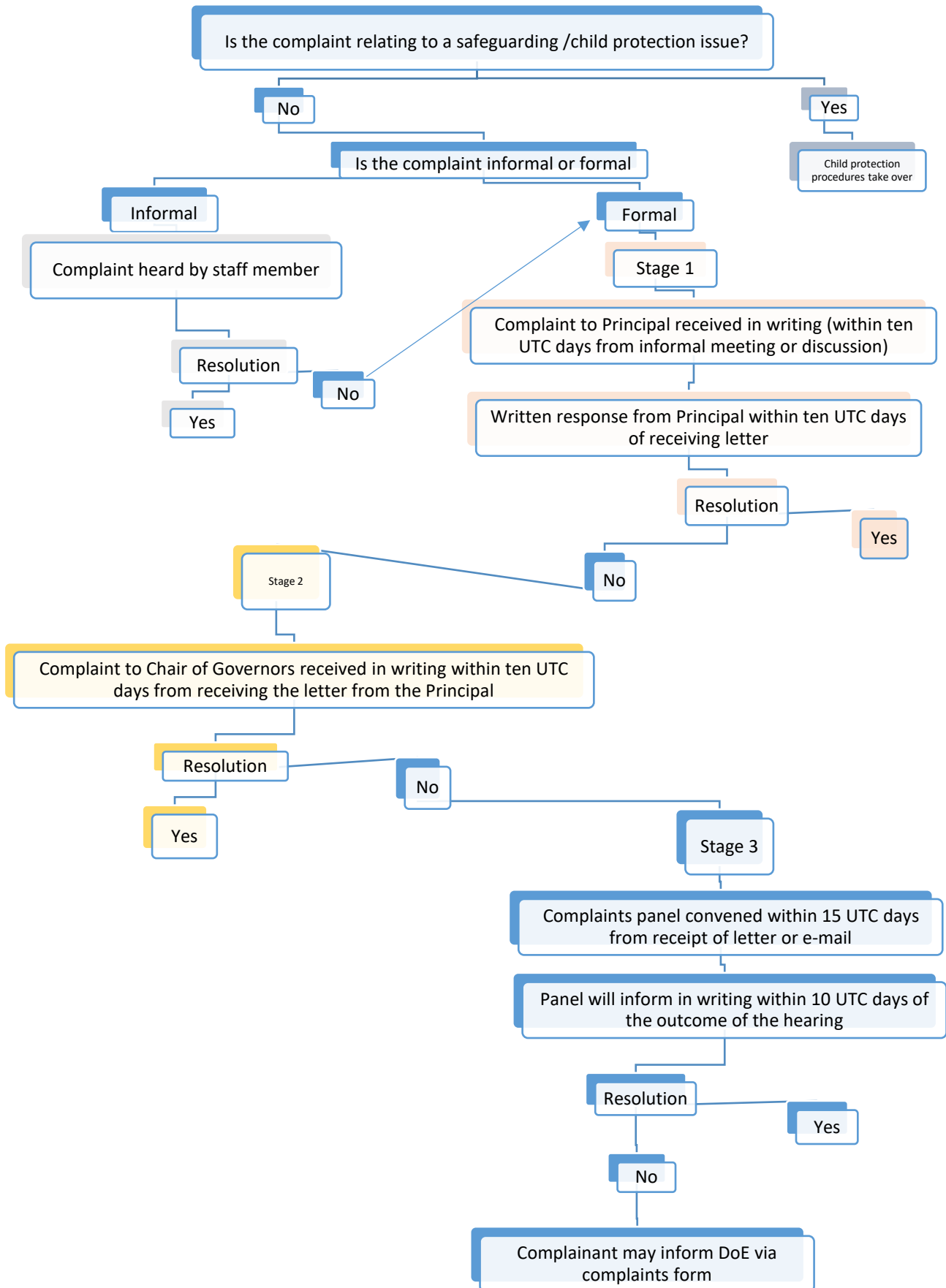
Steps we may take if the complaint is vexatious or unreasonably persistent:

- i. Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- ii. Limit the numbers of times the complainant can make contact
- iii. Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as Citizens Advice
- iv. Put any other strategy in place as necessary
- v. Stop responding
- vi. We may stop responding to the complainant when all these factors are met:
 - We believe we have taken all reasonable steps to help address their concerns
 - We have provided a clear statement of our position and their options
 - The complainant contacts us repeatedly, and we believe their intention is to cause disruption or inconvenience
 - Where we stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will still consider any new complaints they make.
- vii. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from UTC premises.

8. Monitoring and Review

The Trustees monitors the Complaints Procedure, to ensure that all complaints are handled in accordance with the policy. The Principal will log all formal complaints received by the UTC and record how they were resolved. Trustees will examine this log on an annual basis and consider the need for any changes to the procedure.

9. Process



UTC South Durham Complaint Form



Please complete and return to the UTC who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken. (NB It is not necessary to use this form and complaints can be made without using this format.)

Your name	
Student's name	
Your relationship to the student	
Address	
Postcode	
Phone:	
Daytime	
Evening	
Mobile	
Please give details of your complaint.	
What actions, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)	

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

Are you attaching any paperwork? If yes, please give details.

Signature

Date

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent

By whom

Complaint referred to

Date