

National Specialist SCITTs

National Mathematics and Physics SCITT

National Modern Languages SCITT

Complaints Policy

Important: this document can only be considered valid when viewed on the SCITT Intranet or SCITT website. If this document has been printed or saved to another location, you must check that the version number on your copy matches that of the document online.

The accredited provider for both the National Mathematics and Physics SCITT and the National Modern Languages SCITT, is Chorus Education Trust operating as National Specialist SCITTs.

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Name and job title of author:	Katrin Sredzki-Seamer, Director of National Specialist SCITTs
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1. Purpose

The purpose of any complaints system is to address any such concerns in a positive and structured pro-active way. This policy sets out the procedures to be followed in responding to complaints received to National Specialist SCITTs. Appeals against decisions taken by the SCITT should be dealt with through the appropriate Disciplinary or Appeals policy.

2. Principles

National Specialist SCITTs aim to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from trainees and colleagues in the partnership.

For the purpose of this policy a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more person about something the SCITT has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the SCITT.

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 and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school 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.

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

To support this, we will make sure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the SCITT website and intranet.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals. Trainees will not be penalised for raising a complaint about something they are genuinely concerned about, even if those concerns turn out to be misplaced.

3. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in [The Higher Education Act 2004](#) and the [Initial teacher training \(ITT\): criteria and supporting advice](#) set out by the Department for Education.

It is also based on best practice guidance from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The OIA reviews student complaints against higher education providers, including SCITTs,

in England and Wales. Students (i.e. trainees) must first complete the provider's internal complaints process, then submit a formal complaint via the OIA portal (MyOIA) within 12 months of receiving a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter.

4. Scope

The scope of the policy covers most complaints that the SCITT is likely to receive.

This includes for example:

- Complaints about SCITT personnel
- Complaints about placement schools
- Issues with the SCITT training programme
- Health & Safety issues
- Complaints regarding the working environment
- Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination and in general Dignity at Work concerns.

It is usual to disregard anonymous complaints unless someone is prepared to substantiate them. However, anonymous complaints may be investigated at the discretion of the SCITT Director with advice from Chorus Education Trust HR.

This policy prohibits reprisals against trainees or employees because they have complained or have provided information regarding a complaint. Alleged reprisals are subject to the same complaints procedures and penalties as complaints of discrimination and will be dealt with as a disciplinary matter.

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Assessments of fitness to teach and reasonable adjustments
- Safeguarding matters
- Concerns about a decision made under other specific regulations, such as fitness to practise
- Concerns about a decision made by an academic body regarding student progression, academic assessment and awards, which would normally be considered under the academic appeals process
- Suspension from and termination of training
- Whistleblowing
- Grievances
- Professional conduct and discipline
- a concern raised by a trainee about the outcome of their own disciplinary process.

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

Complaints about services provided by other providers such as the PGCE provider or the services used by the placement and hub lead schools should be directed to the provider concerned.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the SCITT throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed
- Do not approach individual members of National Specialist SCITTs or Chorus Education Trust about the complaint
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media.

Trainees will usually be able to make a complaint themselves. However, there may be cases where a trainee is unable or reluctant to make a complaint without support. The SCITT will not accept complaints from third parties unless they are acting as a trainee's representative. In this case the trainee will be asked to confirm their agreement before accepting a complaint from a third party on their behalf.

Trainees can choose to be supported, advised or represented by third parties, for example an officer or adviser from a student representative body or trade union. If a trainee has a representative, that should not delay the process.

5.2 The Investigator

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions.

5.3 The Complaints Co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The Accounting Officer, the Director or Course Leader
- The designated Programme Lead or a Senior Leader of Chorus Education Trust
- Any other staff member providing administrative support.

5.4 Clerk

The SCITT administration manager will act as the clerk and:

- Be the contact point for the complainant and the complaints committee, including circulating the relevant papers and evidence before complaints committee meetings
- Arrange the complaints hearing
- Record and circulate the minutes and outcome of the hearing.

5.5 Chair of Review Panel

The chair of the review panel will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case.

6. Stages of complaint

There are three stages for dealing with complaints:

- Stage 1 – informal resolution
- Stage 2 – formal investigation
- Stage 3 – review panel

6.1 Time scales

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the School-Based Subject Mentor, the Course Leader, the Programme Lead or the Hub Lead Teacher, if possible, either in person or by letter, telephone or email within five working days. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the SCITT Admin office by email.

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

The SCITT will consider exceptions to this timeframe 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.

When complaints are made out of term time, the SCITT will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point the SCITT cannot meet the timescales set out in this policy, they will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay.

6.2 Format

The complainant must ensure that all evidence related to the complaint they wish to be considered is included at the point of submitting their written complaint.

Complaints should be addressing what has happened, who was involved and what the complainant feels would put things right. The complaint must be written in a professional and evidence-based manner.

Further evidence can be requested by the Complaints Investigator or Complaints Panel as part of the investigation.

6.3 Stage 1: informal

The SCITT 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

Director, 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 school office by email.

The clerk will acknowledge informal complaints within five school days, and investigate and provide a response within fifteen school days.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Director and/or the subject of the complaint, if appropriate.

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

6.4 Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the Director and/or the subject of the complaint:

- In a letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf.

The complainant 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.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the school office by email. The headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

Formal complaints will be referred to the SCITT Director in the first instance, who may judge that another suitable person may be more suited to be the Complaints Investigator. If the complaint is about the SCITT Director, this should be referred to the Chief Executive Officer of Chorus Education Trust who will appoint a Complaints Investigator. The same procedures, as detailed below, will apply.

The Director (or other person appointed by the Director for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within fifteen school days.

How to escalate a complaint

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should inform the clerk in writing within ten school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the clerk:

- By letter or email
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on behalf of the complainant.

The clerk will need the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The clerk will acknowledge receipt of the request within five school days.

6.5 Stage 3: review panel

Convening the panel

Complaints will be escalated to the 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 SCITT 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 SCITT management. The panel cannot be made up solely of Chorus Education Trust employees, as they are not independent of the management and running of the SCITT.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 9).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within twenty school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the clerk will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least five school days before the date of the meeting.

The board will ensure that detailed minutes of the hearing are taken.

At the meeting

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted.

At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from the SCITT, 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. We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

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

The panel will then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide copies of the minutes of the hearing and 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 CEO and chair of governor of Chorus Education Trust.

The outcome

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

If the complaint is upheld, the panel will:

- Decide the appropriate action to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the SCITT's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The clerk will inform those involved of the decision in writing within five school days.

If the trainee is not satisfied with this outcome, they are then eligible to refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and a 'Completion of Procedures letter' is issued.

Stage Two and Three will be dealt with, where practicable within 90 calendar days in most circumstances, and may need to be revised, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) – see Publishing policy details below.

7. Possible Outcomes

The complaint should be investigated thoroughly and a clear understanding of what the complainant feels would put the matter right should be clarified and noted. At every stage, the communication between all parties is recorded and collated, with all those involved kept informed throughout.

Every attempt should be made to secure a satisfactory resolution which may include for example:

- An apology
- Mediation
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been managed 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 SCITT policies considering the complaint
- Disciplinary action or informal warnings/management instruction if complaint is upheld.

Performance

This will be judged by the successful resolution of concerns or complaints monitored by the SCITT Director and the SCITT Strategic Board. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator will also keep a record of complaints they receive concerning the SCITT.

8. Unreasonable and persistent complaints

8.1 Unreasonable complaints

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore the SCITT will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- 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 co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- 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 the SCITT's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school 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 the outcome being reached.

Steps the SCITT will take

The SCITT will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and give them a clear statement of the SCITT's position and their options. The SCITT will maintain its role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when SCITT representatives meet with individuals. The SCITT will follow its complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

If the complainant continues to contact the SCITT in a disruptive way, communications strategies may be put in place. The SCITT may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the SCITT will immediately inform the police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from SCITT premises and training events and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

8.2 Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the SCITT again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. The SCITT may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- The SCITT has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the SCITT repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time.

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the SCITT with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience.

Where the SCITT decides to stop responding, the individual will be informed of this intention. The SCITT will also explain that any new complaints they make will be considered provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

8.3 Duplicate complaints

If a complaint has been resolved under this procedure and the SCITT receives a duplicate complaint on the same subject from another individual, the SCITT will assess whether there are aspects that previously hadn't been considered, or any new information needs to be taken into account.

If the SCITT is satisfied that there are no new aspects, the SCITT will:

- Tell the new complainant that this issue has already been investigated and responded to, and that the local process is complete

- Direct them to the OIA if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in section 6 will be repeated.

8.4 Complaint campaigns

Where the SCITT receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the SCITT, the SCITT may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the SCITT website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants.

If complainants are not satisfied with the SCITT's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

9. Record keeping and confidentiality

The SCITT 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 stored securely 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 through a subject access request 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 securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, our privacy notices and record retention schedule.

The details of the complaint, including the names of individuals involved, will only be shared with the appointed review panel in case a further review panel needs to be organised at a later point.

Where the SCITT is aware of the substance of the complaint before the review panel stage, the SCITT 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 SCITT Strategic Board or the Board of Trustees of Chorus Education Trust, who will not unreasonably withhold consent.

10. Monitoring arrangements

The Sub-Committee of Trustees responsible for overseeing the SCITT will review any underlying issues raised by complaints with the CEO and Director 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.

The Trust Board will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Trust Board will track the number and nature of complaints and review underlying issues.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the SCITT Administration Manager.

This policy will be reviewed by the SCITT Director every year. At each review, the policy will be approved by the SCITT Strategic Board.

11. Publishing this Policy

This policy is available through the SCITT website and the SCITT Intranet. A copy can also be requested via the SCITT office.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. Chorus Education Trust operating as National Specialist SCITTs, and the accredited provider for the National Modern Languages (NML) SCITT and the National Mathematics and Physics (NMAP) SCITT, is a member of this scheme. If a trainee teacher is unhappy with decisions made by the SCITT regarding this Policy, they may be able to ask the OIA to review this decision. More information about making a complaint to the OIA, what it can and can't look at and what it can do to put things right if something has gone wrong can be found here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>.

You normally need to have completed the Complaints Procedure before you complain to the OIA. The SCITT will send you a letter called a "Completion of Procedures Letter" when you have reached the end of our processes and there are no further steps you can take internally. If your complaint is not upheld, the SCITT will issue you with a Completion of Procedures Letter automatically. If your complaint is upheld or partly upheld, you can ask for a Completion of Procedures Letter if you want one. You can find more information about Completion of Procedures Letters and when you should expect to receive one here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters>