

United Teaching National SCITT

Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Policy Statement

United Teaching National SCITT prides itself on the quality-of-service delivery provided to its trainee teachers and placement schools. It recognises that trainees and placement schools may, from time to time, have concerns about the quality and scope of service delivery. Trainees and placement schools are encouraged to make those concerns known to United Teaching so that they can be addressed and resolved.

United Teaching will take all concerns and complaints seriously and will make every effort to deal with complaints informally, at an early stage, in the spirit of continued respect and placement.

This is a three-stage process. In most cases, any concern or complaint, regardless of whose attention to whom it is initially brought, should be discussed informally at stage 1, before being submitted to a formal process. Complaints concerning the Accountable Officer for United Teaching may proceed directly to formal process at stage 2 and will be managed by the Chair of the United Learning Professional Development Board.

Definitions

This policy deals with concerns or complaints from United Teaching trainees and placement schools accessing the United Teaching services.

For the purposes of this procedure, **concerns** are defined as having a worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought.

For whistleblowing complaints, please refer to the [UL whistleblowing policy](#).

Policy Aims and Guidance

We aim to:

1: Encourage the **informal and early** resolution of complaints at stage 1, so far as it is possible.

We aim to deal with all matters of concern raised by trainees or placement schools promptly, fairly, openly, and without prejudice. Concerns and complaints are more likely to be resolved informally when all parties commit to working together towards a resolution in the spirit of co-operation. Informal resolutions will usually involve a meeting between the complainant and the Lead Mentor or the United Teaching SCITT Lead.

Trainees and Placement Schools are advised to refer to the Raising Concerns guidance in the Trainee Handbook in the first instance. In most situations a concern can be resolved quickly without reference to the formal complaints procedure.

Any concern or complaint should be listened to by an appropriate member of the United Teaching team (as appropriate to the nature of the complaint). Where further information is needed, we will aim to respond in a timely and sensitive manner. It also helps to understand what a satisfactory outcome would look like to the complainant. We aim to resolve matters at stage 1 within 10 working days.

When managing a concern or complaint informally at stage 1, the complainant, if they are not satisfied with the response, can escalate their complaint to the formal stage of this procedure.

Mediation meetings may be helpful in resolving issues of concern or in mending relationships and moving forward in placement, however; these sit outside of the formal complaints process.

2: Ensure that the complaints process is easy to understand and access and be readily available.

United Teaching has endeavored to make its procedures as accessible as possible. Trainees on the programme or placement schools should not be put off from making a complaint because they are not sure how to do so. This complaints procedure is available on the United Teaching website and can be made available in hard copy on request.

3: Keep the **formal procedure** to two distinct stages.

Stage 2 is a formal investigation and response. Stage 2 complaints should be made to the United Teaching Business Manager (or to the Chair of the United Learning Professional Development Board if the complaint concerns the Accountable Officer) who will investigate and provide a formal response.

Stage 3 is a review of the complaint by the Accountable Officer. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 3, trustees have delegated the Accountable Officer with authority to review the complaint on its behalf at stage 3.

The trainee must be sent a Completion of Procedures letter within 10 working days and informed of the opportunity to appeal externally.

Resolution should be sought at all stages.

4: External Appeal

There is no further procedure internal to United Teaching National SCITT for a complaint to be pursued. A trainee will be issued with a 'Completion of Procedures' (CoP) letter within 10 working days of the completion of step three. The CoP letter will confirm that internal procedures have been exhausted; list the issues raised and considered, and the outcome; and inform the trainee of their right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator together with the deadline for doing so.

5: Records should be kept at both stages of the formal process

It is important that those responsible for reviewing a complaint at each formal stage keep records of what the complaint was, whether it was resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing, any action taken by United Teaching as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether they are upheld), any evidence that was considered, and the outcome. United Teaching will ensure that a copy of the findings and recommendations made at the panel review stage are provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well being made available for inspection.

Any personal information recorded in regard to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (see the ICO [website](#)) and in accordance with the [United Teaching Privacy Notice](#).

United Teaching processes data in accordance with its privacy notice. When dealing with complaints United Teaching (including the Business Manager or Accountable Officer) appointed under the stage [2/3] process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- The name of the complainant.
- The date and time at which the complaint was made.
- The details of the complaint.
- The desired outcome of the complainant.
- How the complaint is investigated (including written records of interviews held).
- Findings and recommendations of investigations.
- Any action taken.
- The complainant's response (satisfaction or further pursuit of complaint).

This may include 'special category personal data' (including sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

6: Review the Complaints Procedure regularly

United Learning is confident that the complaints procedure it recommends to United Teaching is thorough, clear and robust. As a matter of good practice United Learning will therefore review this procedure every two or three years to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The procedure may need to be amended before the review date if, for example, there are any changes to the law, or if it becomes apparent, as a result of a complaint, that the procedure is not working effectively. Any proposed amendment of the procedure will therefore be carried out centrally and submitted to United Teaching for approval at the appropriate board level.

This document is available to all interested parties on request from United Teaching.

7. Next Steps

If trainee teachers or placement schools are unhappy with how United Teaching has managed their complaint under this procedure, they may raise a concern to the following organisations:

OFSTED: Piccadilly Gate, Store St, Manchester, M1 2WD

Phone: 0300 123 4666 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education who can be contacted via their website

<https://www.oiache.org.uk>.

DfE: [Home - Customer Help Portal](#)

United Teaching National SCITT Contact Details

United Teaching Business Manager	Jackie Hayes	Jackie.Hayes@paddington-academy.org
Accountable Officer	Katie Gillam	Katie.Gillam@paddington-academy.org

Procedures

Stage 1: INFORMAL RESOLUTION

United Teaching encourages those that have concerns to raise them with the appropriate person and to work constructively with that person towards resolving them. The majority of concerns can be dealt with without resorting to the formal stages of the formal complaint procedure. We recognise that, almost invariably, the sooner concerns are raised the easier it is for an appropriate resolution to be found.

Initial concerns should be raised as follows:

United Teaching will acknowledge the complaint normally within 3 working days of receipt. They will try to identify areas of agreement and clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred. They may make a written record of your concern or complaint, the date on which it was received, and then try to resolve the matter themselves or refer you to the appropriate person.

The extent to which complainants have attempted informal ways of addressing an issue may be taken into consideration when assessing the reasonableness of a complaint during the formal stages of the procedure.

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally within 10 working days, or if a satisfactory resolution is not achieved, then the complainant should proceed with their complaint in accordance with **stage 2** of this Complaints Procedure.

The timescale for making a complaint

All complaints will be handled within clear and reasonable timescales. Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays. This means that during school holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although United Teaching will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay.

Timescales for investigating and/or responding to a complaint may also need to be extended in the event of a force majeure, a pandemic or as the result of enforced government restrictions. United Teaching will inform complainants if there is to be a delay to the anticipated timescales.

Complainants are expected to proceed with their complaint in a timely and reasonable manner. To enable effective review, United Teaching therefore expects complaints to be raised within 2 months of an issue arising. Complaints outside this timeline will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. These may include (but are not limited to) subsequent information about the complaint coming to light and a valid explanation of why it was not possible to give notification of the complaint sooner. In such cases the Accountable Officer will review the circumstances, may seek advice, and determine whether the complaint is to be considered under this policy. It is also expected that if complainants wish to escalate their complaint to the next stage of the procedure, they will generally do so

within 10 working days of the conclusion of the current stage. Depending upon the circumstances, United Teaching may, acting reasonably, treat a complaint as closed if a complainant has not proceeded within this timeframe.

Maintaining records

Notes may be made to support the informal management of complaints and United Teaching may also keep an informal record of any meeting held or any agreed action to be taken. These will be processed by United Teaching in line with the relevant privacy notice. Records taken and used throughout the complaints process, including correspondence, notes of meetings, telephone calls etc., will be kept securely and in accordance with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

The record of complaints is kept for at least 6 years and may be kept for longer if there is a safeguarding aspect to the complaint.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding academic year is available on request from United Teaching Business Manager.

Maintaining confidentiality

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept strictly confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Concerns and complaints will therefore be dealt with confidentially at all stages and at the conclusion of the procedure. Confidentiality should be maintained all times by everyone involved. Complaints are not to be discussed externally by complainants, including via social media.

Actions taken in relation to United Teaching staff that arise from complaints will remain confidential to United Teaching and the member of staff concerned.

Safeguarding

Wherever a concern indicates that a child's wellbeing or safety is at risk, United Teaching is duty bound to act on this which may include reporting this immediately to the local authority. Any action taken will be in accordance with the lead school's (Paddington Academy) safeguarding policy which is available on the [Academy website](#).

FORMAL RESOLUTION

Stage 2: Investigation and Response – by the Business Manager

1. A request for a formal investigation of a complaint should be made in writing. The Business Manager will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
2. The Business Manager will acknowledge the request in writing, no later than 5 working days of receiving it. The written acknowledgment will, as far as possible, explain how the complaint will be investigated, the timescale for completing any necessary investigation and delivering a response.

3. A log of all correspondence in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Principles.
4. It may be necessary for the Business Manager to carry out further investigation. In investigating, the Business Manager will consider all evidence they consider relevant. This **may** include, but is not limited to:
 - obtaining statements from the complainant and those involved with the complaint
 - meeting/speaking with the complainant and those involved in the complaint
 - reviewing relevant correspondence and other documents relating to the complaint
5. After considering all matters the Business Manager considers relevant, they can decide to:
 - uphold the complaint and direct that certain action be taken to resolve it
 - uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) direct for certain action to be taken, or
 - dismiss the complaint entirely
6. The Business Manager will inform the complainant of their decision in writing, the grounds on which it was made, and any actions taken as a result of the complaint. Wherever reasonably practicable, this will be **within 20 working days** (excluding those that fall in the school holidays) of having issued written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint (see 2 above) or within, 20 working days (excluding those that fall in school holidays) after any meeting or speaking with the complainants to discuss the **stage 2** complaint. The written notification shall also advise the complainant of their right to escalate the complaint to **stage 3** of the formal complaints procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome at **stage 2**.
7. The complainant may request a review at **stage 3** of the procedure within 10 working days of receipt of the stage 2 outcome letter.
8. If the complainant does not invoke a **stage 3** review within this timeframe United Teaching may, acting reasonably, deem the complaint closed.

Stage 3: Review by the Accountable Officer

The complainant is entitled to request a review of the decision and the actions taken at **stage 2**. The review is carried out by the Accountable Officer, at a meeting convened by United Teaching Business Manager and provides an opportunity for the complaint to be heard afresh.

Requests for a review of the decision taken at stage 3 should be made in writing to United Teaching Business Manager (see contact details Page 6) **no later than 10 working days after receipt of written notification of the decision at Stage 2**. The request should include a summary of the complaint, why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 2 and the outcome they are seeking.

United Teaching Business Manager will convene a meeting with the Accountable Officer and will organise the time and date of the stage 3 review meeting, inviting all the attendees, collating all the relevant documentation and distributing this to all parties, no less than 5 working days in advance of the meeting. Minutes of the review meeting will be taken and provided with the written notification of the decision taken at stage 3 (see 9 below).

The following steps are taken at **stage 3**

1. United Teaching Business Manager will acknowledge the written request for the complaint to be reviewed no later than ten working days (not including the school holidays) after receiving it.
2. United Teaching Business Manager will convene a meeting with the Accountable Officer to review the complaint.
3. If the Accountable Officer deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the meeting or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties usually not later than 5 working days prior to the meeting or 3 working days if requested after receipt of the full pack of documents.
4. The review meeting will take place within 20 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) of receipt of the written acknowledgement from United Teaching Business Manager (see 1 above).
5. The review meeting is not a court case and will be as informal as circumstances allow and conducted in such a manner as at the discretion of the Accountable Officer. The meeting may be convened remotely or face to face within the lead school. The Accountable Officer is not legally trained and therefore cannot make findings as to points of law.
6. The Accountable Officer **may** speak with the following, either as part of the review meeting, or as part of any further investigation:
 - the complainant
 - the Business Manager who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 2
 - relevant persons involved in the complaint
 - persons whom, in the view of the Accountable Officer, can provide relevant advice and information relating to the subject of the complaint and the review process at stage 3
7. Where the complainant, Accountable Officer and/or relevant person involved in the complaint have been invited to attend the review meeting, they are entitled to be accompanied by a family member/friend/representative as appropriate. However, legal representatives are not permitted to attend the review meeting.
8. The meeting will go ahead unless the complainant indicates that they are satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. A meeting may proceed notwithstanding the complainant may subsequently decide not to attend, in which case, the Accountable Officer will consider the complaint in absentia and issue findings on the substance of the complaint, thereby bringing the matter to a conclusion.
9. Where the complaint is about the Accountable Officer the complainant may request that the review meeting is held by an independent panel. This is at the discretion of United Learning Trust who will notify the Business Manager of their decision. Where an entirely independent panel is required, timescales may be affected while United Teaching source appropriate individuals for the review.
10. If possible, the Accountable Officer will resolve the complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Accountable Officer will decide how it should be carried out,

and may undertake any such further investigation, and ask for any such further information as it considers necessary, in order to be able to reach a finding in respect of the complaint. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Accountable Officer will make findings as to whether the stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and accordingly can decide to:

- uphold the complaint and recommend that certain action be taken to resolve it;
- uphold the complaint in part (in other words find an aspect or aspects of the complaint to be valid, but not the whole complaint) and recommend certain action to be taken, or
- dismiss the complaint entirely.

11. The Accountable Officer may make recommendations to United Teaching as a result of its deliberations but has no power to compel United Teaching to take action.
12. The complainant, the officer who investigated the complaint and made the decision at stage 2, and, where relevant, the person complained about will be informed in writing of the Accountable Officer's findings and any recommendations, normally no later than 10 working days (excluding those which fall in the school holidays) after the review meeting has taken place.
13. The trainee must be sent a Completion of Procedures letter within 10 working days and informed of the opportunity to appeal externally.
14. A confidential written record of all complaints that are made in accordance with the formal stage of this procedure will be kept by United Teaching. The written record will include whether the complaint has been resolved following a formal procedure and whether it proceeded to a panel review meeting. It will also refer to any action taken by United Teaching, regardless of whether it has been upheld.
15. United Teaching will ensure that a copy of the findings and recommendations made at the panel review stage are provided in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, as well as being made available for inspection on the lead school premises by United Learning and the Accountable Officer.

Stage 3 is the final stage at which United Teaching will consider the complaint.