

The Keele and North Staffordshire Teacher Education SCITT

Complaints and Appeals Policy for Trainees

Approved by: KNSTE Strategic Board

Review interval: Every three Years

Last Review date: January 2023

Next Review Date: January 2026

Audience: Trainees

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Name: (Print) _____

Position: _____

Content

Content	2
Introduction.....	3
Aims and Objectives	4
Complaints Procedure.....	5
Stage 1- Informal Resolution.....	6
Stage Two - Formal Resolution.....	6
Stage 3 – Complaint Panel	7
The Role of Shaw Education Trust	9
Appendix 1 –Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form.....	11
Appendix A - Vexatious Complaints Procedure	12
The SCITT Procedure for dealing with vexatious complaints.....	13

Availability of the Compliments and Complaints Policy

A copy of the KNSTE Compliments and Complaints policy is available from the SCITT Office at Seabridge Primary School and from the Teacher Education Bungalow at Keele University on request. The policy is also published on the KNSTE website.

Compliments

It is always good to receive positive feedback. This will always be shared with staff and Trainees in a timely way via briefings and briefing notes; email; in person where appropriate and via student representative groups.

Cards, emails and letters will be placed in prominent positions around the Teacher Education Bungalow. Where consent is provided compliments will be put onto our website. Compliments can be given in the any format the person chooses:

- Email
- Letter or card
- Telephone
- Verbally to any member of staff
- Via the KNSTE website: <https://knste-shaw.org.uk>

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidance and structure for our procedure to resolve complaints effectively and rapidly at the appropriate level within the Shaw Education Trust SCITT, known as Keele and North Staffordshire Teacher Education (KNSTE)

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. KNSTE is a member of this scheme. If you are unhappy with the outcome you may be able to ask the OIA to review your complaint/appeal. You can find 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 here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>.

You normally need to have completed the KNSTE complaint procedure before you complain to the OIA. KNSTE 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/appeal is not upheld, KNSTE will issue you with a Completion of Procedures Letter automatically. If your complaint/appeal 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>

Aims and Objectives

The SCITT is committed to providing a safe, stimulating consistent and accessible initial teacher training and education programmes. We always aim to provide high quality services for everyone, but accept that sometimes things do not always go to plan. This information is designed to help you inform us of your concerns, who to get in touch with and what we will do to put things right.

A complaint is a clear expression of dissatisfaction, however made, by a person or persons with a legitimate interest in the SCITT about:

- The quality of the initial teacher training and education programmes that we offer
- A SCITT Policy
- An action or lack of action for or on behalf on the SCITT

Our trust aims to be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. When considering a complaint, we endeavour to deal with them as swiftly as possible. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and, in all cases, we put the interests of our Trainees above all other issues. We provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed, and then resolved. This complaints policy has been equalities impact assessed to ensure that it does not discriminate against any of the 9 protected characteristics covered under the Equalities Act 2010.

If you have a complaint i.e. an expression of a specific concern about the provision of a service, either academic or non-academic, that relates specifically to Keele University you can submit this in writing to the University so that the concern can be investigated and resolved. Details on how to submit a complaint and who to submit a complaint to are given at:
<http://www.keele.ac.uk/paa/studentappealscomplaintsandconduct/studentcomplaints/>

If the SCITT is in receipt of a complaint that relates to any aspect of the Keele University provision then the SCITT is required to notify the Keele PGCE Programme Director immediately in writing and to co-operate with Keele as required by Keele in processing and dealing with any complaint.

Some issues may more appropriately be considered under alternative processes rather than under this complaints procedure. For example, the following are not normally dealt with as complaints

- A concern about a decision made by an academic body regarding student progression, academic assessment and awards
- Dissatisfaction about an academic misconduct or disciplinary procedure
- A concern about fitness to practice
- Matters relating to Students Loans Company which has its own complaints procedure.

Complaints Procedure

Our Complaints Procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- Be easily accessible and publicised
- Be simple to understand and use
- Be impartial
- Be equitable
- Be non-adversarial
- Allow swift handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality
- Address all the points at issue and provide effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary
- Provide information to the SCITT's senior management team to enable services to be improved.

The SCITT will be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. We will take concerns seriously at the earliest stage to reduce the numbers that develop into complaints.

If you are dissatisfied and feel that you may wish to make a complaint, it is strongly recommended that you first contact any of the below sources:

- [Students' Union Advice & Support at Keele](#)
- [Student Support & Development Services](#)
- Your Lead Mentor

These sources are able to provide guidance and advice as to which stage it would be most appropriate to make the complaint at and, if necessary, they may also be able to aid in preparing the complaint. If you are asked to attend any meetings or hearings, they would be able to accompany you.

We have adopted a three-stage process for dealing with complaints:

- Stage 1 – Complaint heard by member of staff
- Stage 2 – Complaint heard by SCITT Director (or Chairperson of Strategic Board)
- Stage 3 – Complaint heard by Complaint Panel

Stage 1- Informal Resolution

We expect most concerns to be dealt with informally and trainees are encouraged to speak to a member of staff to discuss their concerns. We aim to resolve informal complaints within 10 working days of receipt.

The formal procedures set out below should be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

If a trainee is concerned about anything to do with the training that we are providing within the SCITT they should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their Lead Mentor.

The SCITT operates an open-door policy and as such, trainees may wish to book in some time to talk to the SCITT Director (or a person delegated to undertake this meeting) if this would be beneficial in resolving your concern informally.

Should the complaint be about the SCITT Director, the Chair of Strategic Board will do all they can to resolve the issue informally through a dialogue with the persons concerned.

In all cases, you are strongly encouraged to attempt to resolve your issue at the lowest level possible. Attempting to resolve the issue informally by speaking to the member of staff concerned enables the issue to be dealt with effectively and may help to avoid the need for further escalation; if the issue is raised with the member of staff directly they can often provide an immediate explanation of solution.

In order to raise an issue informally, you are advised to contact the member of staff most concerned with the issue orally. If you are not able to do so, you may raise the issue with any of the sources of advice and assistance listed above who will take the matter forward on your behalf. The member of staff will then provide a response to you (or your representative) orally within 10 working days of receipt

Stage Two - Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis (as set out above), then trainees must put their complaint in writing (using Appendix 1 attached if required) and hand this in to the SCITT for the attention of the SCITT Director. The SCITT Director will consider any such complaint seriously.

Should the complaint be about the SCITT Director, it will then be considered by the Chair of Strategic Board who will follow the steps below.

The complaint will be investigated thoroughly (by the SCITT Director or a person delegated to undertake the investigation).

The SCITT Director will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases, the SCITT Director will meet or speak with the trainee concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

The SCITT Director (or a person delegated to undertake this work) will use reasonable endeavours to speak to or meet a trainee within 10 working days of the formal complaint being received.

Once the SCITT Director is satisfied that, so far as practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made which will be communicated to the trainee in writing giving the reasons for the decision.

The written decision should be provided no later than 10 working days after speaking with or meeting with the trainee to discuss the matter.

The SCITT will hold a written record of all formal complaints, including records of meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, and the SCITT's decision. The record will be retained for one year after the trainee leaves the SCITT.

Only if Stage 2 proceedings fail to resolve the matter should a complaint progress to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Complaint Panel

If trainees (or other person(s)) seek to invoke Stage 3, following failure to reach an earlier resolution with the SCITT Director or Chair of Strategic Board's decision, in respect of their formal complaint, they may request their complaint is considered by an Independent Complaints Panel.

Such a request must be made in writing addressed to the Chair of the Strategic Board, care of the SCITT. The Chair of the Strategic Board will not be involved in the panel if he/she heard the original complaint at stage 2.

The request for further assessment of the complaint will, for the purposes of this procedure, be known as an 'appeal'.

Trainees must lodge their appeal in writing within 10 working days of the date of the SCITT's decision made in accordance with the Stage 2 procedure.

The trainee should provide in writing the complaint(s) made against the SCITT and how they believe the complaint has been unsatisfactorily resolved, along with the remedies sought in respect of each.

The Complaints Panel is only obliged to consider the complaint lodged in this 'initial submission' although they may use their discretion to consider other relevant and related matters that may subsequently arise.

Where an appeal is received by the SCITT, the SCITT will, within 5 working days, refer the matter to the Director of Compliance at the Shaw Education Trust. Where the appeal is received by the SCITT during SCITT holidays, or within 2 working days of their commencement, the SCITT has 5 working days upon commencement of the SCITT term to refer the matter to the Director of Compliance. The Director of Compliance will provide an independent source of advice on procedure for all parties. On receipt of an appeal, the Director of Compliance will then instruct a KNSTE clerk to convene an Independent Complaints Panel hearing as soon as possible, usually no later than 20

school days after receipt of the notification from the trainee that they wish to invoke Stage 3. The panel date will be dependent upon the availability of the panel members.

The Complaints Panel will be formed at the request of the complainant through the SCITT's Strategic Board.

The Complaints Panel will consist of a Board member who has not previously been involved in the complaint. This Board member will be the chair of the committee.

The Chair of the Complaints Panel will then be joined by two partnership head-teachers who have not previously been involved with the complaint, and who have not previously been involved with either the complainant or staff involved in the complaint.

The following are entitled to attend a hearing and/or, submit written representations and address the Panel:

- The trainee who may be accompanied should they wish this to be the case
- The SCITT Director
- Any other interested person whom the Complaints Panel considers having a reasonable and just interest in the appeal and whose contribution would assist the panel in their decision-making.

Where required, the Complaints Panel may request any reports, documents, chronology or other useful information in advance of the hearing. Evidence will be sent to and collated by the Clerk who will distribute the information to the relevant parties in advance of the hearing.

After due consideration of the facts considered relevant, the panel will reach a decision, and make recommendations, which it shall complete within 10 working days of the hearing.

The decision reached by the Complaints Panel is final.

Any decision reached that may have financial implications for the SCITT will need the appropriate approval from the Shaw Education Trust, although any such approval must be compatible with the decision of the Complaints Panel.

Where relevant a copy of the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the person(s) complained about.

The records related to the complaint, including letters, will be made available for inspection by the SCITT Director and Trustees, including those acting on behalf of the Shaw Education Trust Board of Trustees.

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and any actions taken regardless of whether they are upheld or resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing.

Complaint records are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection request access to them.

The Role of Shaw Education Trust

You do not have a right of appeal to Shaw Education Trust should you disagree with a decision of the Strategic Board. You may, however, raise the matter with Shaw Education Trust if you consider the complaint was not investigated properly or fairly. So long as the Strategic Board followed a proper procedure and considered the complaint in a reasonable manner, then the Shaw Education Trust will simply inform you of that fact. If you wish to raise the matter with Shaw Education Trust please write to:

Chief Operating Officer
Shaw Education Trust Head Office
Kidsgrove Secondary School,
Gloucester Road,
Kidsgrove
ST7 4DL

In your letter please explain:

- what your complaint to the SCITT was
- what response they have made to it
- why you think that the SCITT has not followed a proper procedure in considering your complaint, and/or
- why you think that their consideration of it was unreasonable.

You will receive a written response within 10 working days to inform you of any further enquiries made into your complaint.

Where the complaint is about a Trust Central Services member of staff, we will follow the same 3 tier complaint structure replacing the following people

- Stage 1 – Complaint heard by member of staff line manager
- Stage 2 – Complaint heard by senior manager e.g. Chief Operating Officer
- Stage 3 – Complaint heard by an Intendent Complaint Panel

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The Shaw Education Trust Board will review this policy at least every three years and assess its implementation and effectiveness.

The SCITT Strategic Board monitor the SCITT's complaints procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly.

The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the Shaw Education Trust.

The Strategic Board will take into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process and make any modifications necessary to this policy.

This policy is made available to all ATs so that they can be properly informed about the complaints process.

Appendix 1 –Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form

Your Name	
Your Address including postcode	
Telephone/Mobile Number	
Email address	

Your complaint:

1. Please provide full details of your complaint, including relevant dates and persons concerned where possible.
2. What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint? (who did you speak to and what was their response?).
3. How do you feel the problem could be resolved at this stage?
4. Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please provide details.

Signed	
Date	

Thank you for completing the form and providing us with details of your complaint. Please send in your completed form to the SCITT Director via email. All paperwork will be held on file securely.

Appendix A - Vexatious Complaints Procedure

The SCITT are committed to the improvement of our partnership and associated ITTE programmes. We welcome feedback and will always try to resolve concerns as quickly as possible. Sometimes however complainants may treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable and or behave in an unacceptable manner. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening, inappropriate or harassing behaviour. The aim of this appendix is to clarify the process for dealing with unreasonable complainants.

What do we mean by an unreasonable complainant?

An unreasonable complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. Unreasonable behaviour may include actions which are

- Out of proportion to the nature of the complaint or
- Persistent, even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted or
- Personally harassing or
- Prolific
- Inconsistent with the aim of reaching a resolution or
- Unrealistic
- Involve the use of abusive or threatening language or
- Refusing to attend appointments to discuss a complaint

What is harassment?

Behaviour that

- Appears to be targeted over a significant period of time at one or more members of staff
- The way in which the complaint is pursued causes inappropriate distress to staff
- Has a disproportionate effect on the SCITT community
- Are aggressive and not appropriate to an effective resolution.

What are the SCITT's responsibilities?

- To follow the complaints procedure
- Respond in a reasonable time
- Be available for consultation within a reasonable time limit
- Respond with courtesy and respect
- Attempt to reach reasonable resolutions
- Keep complainants informed.

Expectations of complainants

- To follow the complaints procedure
- Treat staff with courtesy and respect
- Never use violence or threats of violence towards people or property
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff work and so allow a reasonable response time
- Be prepared to work towards a reasonable resolution

The SCITT Procedure for dealing with vexatious complaints

The SCITT will take the following course of action:

- Inform the complainant informally that their behaviour is now considered by the SCITT to be unreasonable or unacceptable and request a changed approach
- Inform the complainant in writing that their behaviour is considered to fall under the unreasonable / harassment criteria
- Require a third person to be present at all meetings with notes being taken and shared between all parties
- Inform the complainant that only complaints in writing will be responded to
- Inform the complainant that the matter will only be dealt with once the complainant's behaviour is changed.

Physical or verbal aggression

The SCITT will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression. If staffs are subject to this type of aggression the SCITT will

- Suspend the complainant from the partnership until an appropriate resolution can be facilitated.

Once the behaviour has changed the complaint will be dealt with in the appropriate timescales.

Legitimate new complaints will be considered even if the person making them has made a vexatious complaint in the past.