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The Westminster
Specialist College

2025/26

Complaints Policy

Approved by Board of Governors on:	**8/7/2025**
Signed by Chair of Governors:	P Coldicott
Head of College:	O Flowers
Lead Personnel:	O Flowers
Date of Review:	8/7/2026

Policies and Procedures

Introduction

As part of our provision, The Westminster Specialist College also delivers DFN Project SEARCH, a supported internship programme for young people with learning disabilities and/or autism. Complaints relating to these externally hosted internships (e.g. at host employer sites) are also covered by this policy, and the College will liaise with employers and job coaches to ensure appropriate responses.

It is in everyone's interests that concerns are resolved/clarified at the earliest possible stage. Where concerns are raised the College will work with the individual who raised the concern to identify what would resolve the situation and then endeavour to find a resolution at the earliest opportunity.

Initial concerns should be dealt with by an appropriate member of staff. These should be taken seriously, and every effort made to resolve matters as quickly as possible. In certain cases, it may be appropriate to forward these to the Head of College (or to the Chair of Governors if the complaint is about the Head of College).

Where it is not possible to resolve concerns informally, the formal complaints procedure can be accessed.

This document outlines how complaints will be dealt with under the Formal Complaints Policy.

Complainants will always be given the opportunity to complete the complaints process in full, regardless of whether it is felt that that the complaint is justified or not.

If the complaints process is ongoing and further enquiries are received regarding the same subject, we will not respond to the new enquires/complaints. This is because it is unhelpful to have more than one investigation ongoing which duplicate the issues being investigated.

Who can make a complaint?

This includes complaints about any aspect of the DFN Project SEARCH programme, including concerns about provision at host employer sites, placement experiences, job coaching, or transition planning. All such concerns will be handled with due regard to safeguarding, employment legislation and statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any provision of facilities or services that a College provides, unless statutory procedures apply (such as exclusions or admissions, a list is included within the next section).

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Head of College or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine where the complaint warrants an investigation.

Complaints received outside of term time:

Complaints made outside of term time will be receipted as having been received on the first College day after the holiday period.

Exclusions to the complaints procedure:

The following issues will not be subject to the College's complaints procedure as they are outside of the College's jurisdiction:

- admission to Colleges;
- exclusions from College;
- statutory assessments of Special Education Needs
- statutory proposals for College reorganisation;
- claims for damages
- staff grievance or disciplinary matters
- child protection issues;
- claims for damages.

Complaints made against college staff will be considered, however where it is determined that matters should be dealt with under the College's grievance and disciplinary procedures complainants will not be informed of the outcome.

Where a complaint relates to the behaviour of a student this may be subject to the College's conduct and disciplinary procedures and the detail will remain confidential to the College and the parents of the student involved.

Complainants can be assured that the complaints will be investigated fully but due to data protection information will not be shared with them in these circumstances.

Where complaints concern adult safeguarding matters these should be raised with the College but will not usually be considered as a formal complaint where there is likely to be a Safeguarding Investigation.

Where a complaint is received which should not be dealt with as a formal complaint the College will write to the complainant to advise them of this and the reason for the decision. The College will confirm the correct process to be followed.

Accessibility

The College ensures that complaint materials and procedures are accessible to all, including learners with disabilities or communication needs, in line with the Equality Act 2010. Alternative formats, advocates or communication supports can be provided upon request.

The College will ensure that the formal complaints procedure is:

- easily accessible and publicised both within the College and available on the College website.
- simple to understand and use.
- impartial and in the spirit of working together co-operatively to reach the best resolution for everyone.
- respectful of confidentiality for all.

Time limit for making a complaint:

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Recording Complaints:

Formal complaints should be made on the form provided by the College, this is to ensure that there is an accurate record of the complaint and it is clearly understood. However, if

complainants are unable to complete this form, complaints will be accepted in the following ways:

- in person;
- by telephone; or
- in writing.

When a formal complaint is received the College will write to the complainant within five College days to confirm what will happen next and the anticipated timescales.

Keeping people informed

Each stage of the complaints process has an agreed timescale which should be adhered to. If for any reason this is not possible, the College/Board of Governors will write to the complainant to explain the reasons and confirm when the action will be completed.

Stages of the complaints process:

The following outlines the stages of the formal complaints procedure. At the end of each stage of the procedure, complainants will be advised of how to progress to the next stage if they remain dissatisfied.

Stage	Timescale
Stage 1 Formal Complaint	• Letter to be sent within 5 days of the College receiving the complaint to confirm how the complaint will proceed with timescales. • Full response by College within 15 College days of receiving the complaint.
Request for stage 2 review	• To be made by complainant within 10 College days of receiving the outcome of the stage 1 complaint.
College to acknowledge stage 2 request	• Acknowledgement letter to be issued within 5 College days
Panel meeting to hear the complaint	• Panel to meet within 20 working days of receiving the complaint
Stage 2 review panel arrangements confirmed	• At least 10 College days before the meeting the Clerk will confirm the date, time and venue and ask for any additional information to be provided at least 5 days prior to the panel
Panel decision to be issued	• Within 5 College days of the panel meeting
Request for LA review of process	• To be made by complainant within 10 College days of receiving the outcome of the stage 2 review.
Review by LA	• To be completed within 10 working days of receiving the request to review

Formal stage one: a formal complaint will be investigated by the Head of College or person nominated by the Head of College. The investigation will be completed within 15 College days and at the end of the investigation a full written response will be sent to the complainant.

If the formal complaint is about the Head of College, this will be dealt with by the Chair of Governors. This is Phil Coldicott.

Complaints made against the Chair of Governors or any individual governors are addressed to the Clerk to the Board of Governors. The Clerk should then arrange for the complaint to be heard by a suitably skilled and impartial member of the Board of Governors (Stage 1) and then a committee at Stage 2.

Complaints made against the entire Board of Governors or complaints involving both the Chair and Vice Chair should also be sent to the Clerk, who should then determine the most appropriate course of action. This will depend on the nature of the complaint.

Where a complaint relates to a member of staff this may be subject to internal staffing procedures and the outcome of such investigations will not be shared with complainants.

Where a complaint relates to the behaviour of a student this may be subject to the College's conduct and disciplinary procedures and the detail will remain confidential to the College and the parents of the student involved.

Complainants should be assured that the complaints will be investigated fully but due to data protection information will not be shared with them and this should be confirmed in writing.

Formal stage two: if stage one has been completed and the complainant wishes to take the matter further they can escalate their complaint to Stage 2. This will be a meeting with members of the Board of Governors's complaints committee, which will be formed by the first three, impartial, governors available.

The request to progress to stage 2 should be made in writing within 10 College days of receiving the stage 1 response and addressed to the Clerk to Governors via the College office.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 College days.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. The College will aim to convene a meeting within 20 College days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed. If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Chair will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence based on written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting they will decide between themselves who will act as Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors available, the Clerk can source additional, independent governors from a different College. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide on whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making the decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs. If it is agreed to invite parties to a meeting, then all parties should be invited including the Stage 1 complaints investigator and the complainant.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, it is not encouraged for either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. The meeting should be held in the spirit of reconciliation and attempt to reach a resolution which is acceptable to all.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 College days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- Confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- Request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 days before the meeting

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 College days before the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the original complaint. New complaints must be dealt with at stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken. The Chair should arrange for either the Clerk or suitable person to record the minutes of the meeting

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

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

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to the College's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future

Complainants have the right to request an independent panel if they believe that there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The College will consider approaching a different College to ask for help or contact the local Governor Services team commissioned by the LA, or the Diocese. The College will consider any such request but ultimately, the final decision is made by the Chair of Governors.

The complaints panel will decide on whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making the decision they will be

sensitive to the complainant's needs. If it is agreed to invite parties to a meeting, then all parties should be invited including the stage 1 investigator and the complainant.

Next Steps for complainants who remain dissatisfied with the way in which the investigation was conducted:

If a complaint relates to a DFN Project SEARCH placement and remains unresolved, the College may liaise with DFN Foundation or the host employer's HR/complaints process for further resolution, with the learner's and family's consent.

When stage 2 has been completed, this is the end of the College complaints procedure. If after following the College's complaints procedure, an individual is not satisfied, the College can provide advice on how the complainant can be considered by the Skills and Funding Agency or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

Social Media

Individuals should be aware that a complaint can be undermined by:

- Comments made on social media
- Identifying individuals staff on social media
- Personal abuse targeted towards individual members of staff
- Physical or verbal threats targeted to individuals or groups of staff

These behaviours amount to harassment and will be dealt with by the police.

Serial and Persistent Complainants

The College is committed to working with anyone who raises an issue to take this seriously and work towards finding a solution to concerns. Generally, this should be a straightforward process and the College values the feedback that we receive on services.

We accept that complainants may ask difficult questions where they believe that things have gone wrong and have a right to go through the complaints process. However, in a minority of cases people pursue their feedback in a way which is inappropriate.

Where the College is contacted repeatedly by individuals making the same point or asking for reconsideration on our position, the College will need to take appropriate action. The College has a Serial and Persistent Complaints Policy for these difficult situations. This policy sets out what is unreasonable behaviour and the action that will be taken to address this. The procedure is available on the College website.

The application of a 'serial' or 'persistent' marking will be made against the subject of the complaint itself rather than the complainant.

Appendix 1 Model complaint form (Stage 1)

The Westminster Specialist College Complaint Form

Please complete this form and return it to the College office or to the Head of College who will acknowledge its receipt within 5 College days and inform you of the next stage in the procedure.

Your name	
Relationship with College (e.g. parent of a student on the College roll):	
Student's name (if relevant to your complaint):	

Your address:

Telephone numbers	Daytime:		Evening
Email:			

Please confirm below the details of your complaint, include dates, names of witnesses and any other information which is relevant to enable your complaint to be investigated. Please continue on a separate sheet if more space is required.

If you have taken any actions to try to resolve this complaint, please confirm the details below and include the names of people you have spoken to.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?

College use:

Date form received:	
Received by:	
Complaint being dealt with by:	
Date acknowledgment sent:	
Target response date:	

Appendix 2 Model complaint review request form (Stage 2)

The Westminster Specialist College Complaint Review Request Form

Please complete this form and return it to the Clerk to the Board of Governors (via the College office), who will acknowledge its receipt and inform you of what will happen next.

Your name	

Your address:

Telephone numbers	Daytime:		Evening
Email:			

Dear College,

I submitted a formal complaint to the College on _____ and am dissatisfied with the outcome.

My complaint was submitted to _____ and I received a response from _____ on _____

I have attached copies of my formal complaint and of the response from the College.

I am dissatisfied with the outcome of my complaint for the following reasons:

Please use a separate sheet if necessary.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem?

College use:

Date form received:	
Received by:	
Complaint being dealt with by:	
Date acknowledgment sent:	
Target response date:	

Appendix 3 Model guidance for all parties attending a complaints panel (Stage 2)

Complaint Panel meetings will be heard in the spirit of reconciliation and will focus on finding an acceptable resolution to the issues which have been raised. The Panel is not part of a legal process and no party should feel that they need to have legal representation. The Panel Chairperson will ensure that all parties have the opportunity to have their say and to be understood.

The Chairperson will decide on how the Panel should be run and if it is decided that the complaint will be heard in person by the Panel then both the parent/carer and the stage 1 investigator will be invited to attend.

The following contains guidance for people attending a complaints Panel:

1. Please make every effort to be punctual and arrive on time for the meeting.

2. Please make reasonable efforts to be available. If three dates have been offered which cannot be attended the Panel can decide to go ahead and hear the complaint without anyone attending in person.

3. If anyone has any special requirements, please inform the Clerk so that suitable arrangements can be made.

4. The Panel will want to hear about the complaint and the issues which remain unresolved and will invite everyone to have their say.

5. All attendees are requested to show respect to all during the meeting and address any questions through the Chairperson.

6. The minutes of the meeting will be noted by the Clerk to the panel as it is not permitted to record the meeting.

7. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

8. Clerk will retain electronic copies and one master copy of the documentation. All other copies will be collected in and shredded.

Appendix 4 Model complaints meeting agenda (Stage 2)

1. The Chair of the Complaints Committee will welcome and introduce all parties.
2. The Chair will outline the process to be followed and how the decision will be reached.
3. The Chair will invite the parents/carers to present the complaint to the meeting.
4. The Chair will invite the Stage 1 complaints investigator to present their view.
5. All parties will have the opportunity to ask questions which should be addressed through the Chair.
6. All parties will have the opportunity to make any final comments.
7. The Chair will ask all to leave the room to allow the Panel to come to their decision. Before everyone leaves the Chair will inform both parties that they should receive a response from the Panel in writing within 5 College days.
8. The Panel will make their decision which will be recorded by the Clerk who will put this in writing for the Panel to be circulated to the complainant.
9. Clerk will retain electronic copies and a single hard copy of the papers used for the panel meeting. All other copies will be handed in to the College for shredding.