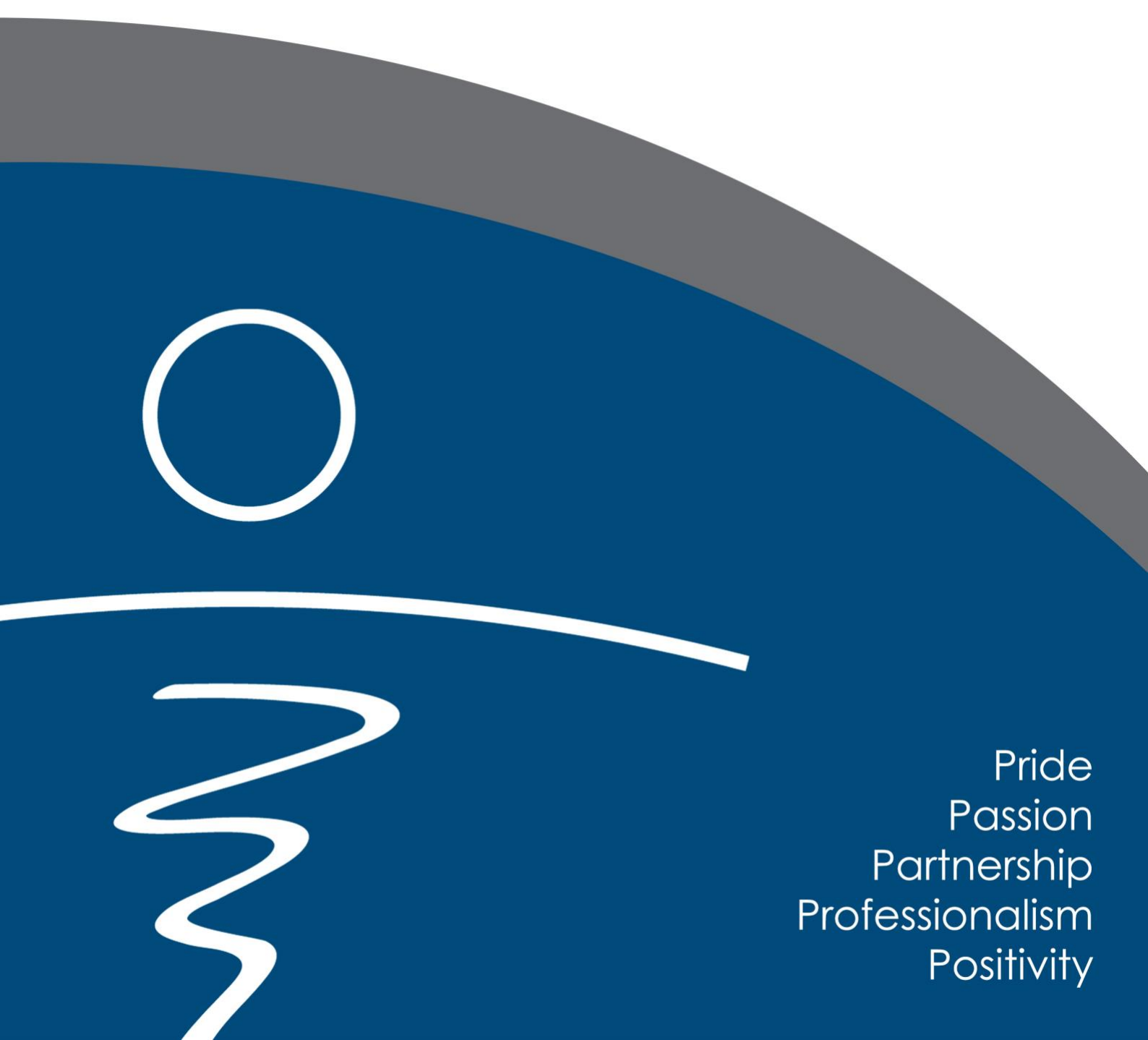


Trust Complaints Procedure

A large, stylized graphic of a person's head and shoulders, rendered in white lines on a dark blue background. The head is a simple circle, and the shoulders are a wavy line. The background is a gradient of dark blue and grey.

Pride
Passion
Partnership
Professionalism
Positivity

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Policy Owner	Hermann Farrington, Chief Executive
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Should you have any queries regards this policy, note an omission or wish to propose an amendment, please email matt.lake@thebridgetrust.academy

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Trust Complaints Procedure

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This procedure applies to complaints about The Bridge Trust's central services, executive leadership, Trust Directors and Trust-wide decisions.
- 1.2. The Trust is committed to resolving concerns fairly, promptly and proportionately, and encourages concerns to be raised at the earliest possible opportunity.
- 1.3. This procedure should be read in conjunction with the Trust's Complaints Framework Policy which establishes the principles, governance arrangements and expectations that apply to all complaints handled by The Bridge Trust.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This procedure applies to complaints concerning:
 - Trust central services;
 - Finance, People Services, Estates, Governance, IT and School Improvement services;
 - Senior executive leaders;
 - The Chief Executive;
 - The conduct of Trust Directors;
 - Trust-wide decisions;
 - Trust policies and procedures.

3. Matters Covered by Other Procedures

- 3.1. The following matters are not normally considered under this procedure:
 - Complaints about individual schools;
 - Admissions appeals;
 - Exclusion reviews;
 - Safeguarding concerns;
 - SEND assessments and EHCP decisions;
 - Staff grievances;
 - Whistleblowing disclosures;
 - Data protection complaints;
 - Matters subject to legal proceedings.
- 3.2. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action by the Trust, its schools or those acting on its behalf.
- 3.3. Where appropriate, complainants will be directed to the relevant procedure.
- 3.4. Anonymous complaints will be considered at the discretion of the Chief Executive or Chair of Trust Board depending on the subject matter and the seriousness of the issues raised.

4. Time Limits

- 4.1. Complaints should normally be raised:
- Within three months of the event occurring;
 - Within three months of the complainant becoming aware of the matter.
- 4.2. The Trust may consider complaints outside these timescales where exceptional circumstances apply.

5. Informal Resolution (Stage One)

- 5.1. The Trust encourages complainants to raise concerns informally before making a formal complaint.
- 5.2. Concerns should be raised with the appropriate service lead, executive leader or officer responsible for the area concerned.
- 5.3. The Trust will seek to resolve concerns through:
- Discussion;
 - Clarification;
 - Explanation;
 - Informal meetings;
 - Agreed actions where appropriate.
- 5.4. Where concerns remain unresolved, the complainant may progress to Stage Two.

6. Formal Complaint (Stage Two)

6.1. Submitting a Complaint

- 6.1.1. Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the Trust Governance Professional. The Trust may provide a standard complaint form to support complainants, although its use is not mandatory.
- 6.1.2. The complaint should include:
- The complainant's name and contact details;
 - Details of the complaint;
 - Relevant dates;
 - Any supporting evidence;
 - The outcome being sought.

6.2. Acknowledgement

- 6.2.1. The Trust will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days.
- 6.2.2. The acknowledgement will confirm:
- Who will investigate the complaint;
 - The next steps in the process;
 - The anticipated timescale for responding.

6.3. Investigation

- 6.3.1. The complaint will be investigated by an appropriate individual who has had no prior involvement in the matter.
- 6.3.2. Investigations may include:
- Reviewing documentation;
 - Meeting relevant individuals;
 - Obtaining witness accounts;
 - Reviewing correspondence;
 - Considering relevant policies and procedures.
- 6.3.3. The investigator may seek additional information from the complainant where required before reaching a conclusion.

6.4. Outcome

- 6.4.1. The Trust will normally provide a written response within ten working days of acknowledgement.
- 6.4.2. Where this is not possible, the complainant will be informed of:
- The reasons for the delay;
 - The revised timescale.
- 6.4.3. The outcome letter will explain:
- The findings of the investigation;
 - The reasons for the decision;
 - Any actions to be taken;
 - How to request a Stage 3 review.
- 6.4.4. Outcomes may include explanation, clarification, apology, service improvement, corrective action or any other remedy considered appropriate by the Trust.

7. Alternative Investigators and Conflicts of Interest

- 7.1. Where necessary, the Chief Executive, Chair of Trust Board or Trust Board may nominate an alternative investigator in order to avoid conflicts of interest or to ensure the effective administration of this procedure.

8. Responsibility Matrix

Complaint Relates To	Investigated By
Trust Service	Relevant Executive Leader
Executive Leader	Chief Executive
Chief Executive	Chair of Trust Board or nominated Trust Director
Trust Director	Chair of Trust Board
Chair of Trust Board	Vice Chair or independent Trust Director nominated by the Trust Board
Trust Governance Professional	Chair of Trust Board or nominee
Trust-wide Policy or Strategic Decision	Chief Executive or Chair of Trust Board depending on the subject matter
Trust Board Acting Collectively	Independent Director or Independent External Investigator appointed by the Trust Board

9. Complaints Review Panel (Stage Three)

9.1. Requesting a Review

9.1.1. If dissatisfied with the Stage Two outcome, the complainant may request a review by a Complaints Review Panel.

9.1.2. Requests must:

- Be made in writing;
- Be submitted within ten working days of the Stage Two outcome;
- Explain why the complainant remains dissatisfied.

9.2. Convening a Panel

9.2.1. The Governance Professional will arrange a Complaints Review Panel.

9.2.2. The Panel will:

- Consist of three members;
- Have had no prior involvement in the complaint;
- Include at least one independent member.

10. Role of the Complaints Review Panel

10.1. The role of the Panel is not normally to reinvestigate the complaint.

10.2. The Panel will consider:

- Whether the complaint was investigated appropriately;

- Whether all relevant evidence was considered;
- Whether procedures were followed;
- Whether the outcome was reasonable;
- Whether further actions should be recommended.

10.3. The Panel may:

- Uphold the complaint in full;
- Uphold part of the complaint;
- Dismiss the complaint;
- Recommend service improvements;
- Recommend policy or procedural changes;
- Recommend that the complaint be referred for consideration under another Trust policy or procedure where appropriate.

11. Panel Hearing Arrangements

11.1. The hearing will normally be held within twenty working days of the request for review.

11.2. The complainant may:

- Attend the hearing;
- Submit written representations;
- Be accompanied by a friend, relative, advocate or interpreter.

11.3. Attendance is not mandatory and the Panel may consider written submissions where a complainant does not wish to attend.

11.4. Relevant documentation will normally be circulated no later than five working days before the hearing.

12. Panel Decision

12.1. The Panel's decision will normally be issued in writing within ten working days of the hearing.

12.2. The decision letter will:

- Summarise the complaint;
- Summarise the Panel's findings;
- Explain the decision reached;
- Set out any recommendations or actions.

12.3. The decision of the Panel represents the final stage of the Trust's internal complaints process.

13. Persistent, Serial or Unreasonable Complaints

13.1. The Trust may place reasonable restrictions on communication where an individual:

- Repeatedly pursues matters already concluded;
- Makes excessive demands on resources;
- Behaves in an abusive, aggressive or threatening manner;
- Submits persistent and repetitive correspondence without significant new information.

13.2. Any restrictions will be communicated in writing.

14. Record Keeping

14.1. The Trust will retain records of:

- Complaints received;
- Investigations undertaken;
- Correspondence;
- Hearing papers;
- Panel decisions;
- Resulting actions.

14.2. Records will be stored in accordance with the Trust's data protection and records management requirements.

15. Final External Route

15.1. Once the Complaints Review Panel has issued its written decision, the Trust's internal complaints process is complete.

15.2. If a complainant believes that the Trust has not followed its published complaints procedures or has acted unreasonably, they may refer the matter to the Department for Education in accordance with the arrangements applicable to academy trusts.