



Putting young people first

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WHEELS VOCATIONAL & LIFE SKILLS CENTRE

Parental Complaints Policy

Adopted September 2013

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Next Review: September 2026

Company Registration No. 06608327

Registered Charity No. 1157795

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Introduction

This policy confirms the written records will include the required information set out within the Standards. It also complies with Schedule 1, Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014 (Effective 5th. January 2015).

PART 7 -provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

All correspondence will be kept securely in the Centre's Main Office, in lockable storage containers with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to access.

This policy applies to all concerns and complaints other than:

- **Child Protection** issues and
- **Exclusions** where separate procedures apply.

Timescales

We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales are indicated in relevant sections of this policy.

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The Centre will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first working day after the holiday period.

Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint by a parent/carer is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents/carers' and students' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of resolving the issue in a transparent manner.

Wheels Vocational & Life Skills Centre expects that most concerns can be resolved informally and guarantees to treat seriously and confidentially all concerns whether raised informally or formally.

Policy Statement

We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that, a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly, can soon become a cause of resentment, which could be damaging to relationships. We intend that parents/carers and students should never feel – or be made to feel – that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a student or his/her opportunities at Wheels VLS Centre. The policy, however, distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally, and a formal complaint which will require further investigation.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of students that attend the provision. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to the Centre about any

provision of facilities or services that we provide.

The Difference Between a Concern and a Complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Wheels VLS Centre takes concerns serious and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, please contact Clare Dulson, Business Manager, who will refer you to another member of staff.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Wheels VLS Centre will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint (Appendix 1)

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the Business Manager or Centre's Head. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual Trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against the Centre's staff (except the Head of Centre) should be made in the first instance to Jason Garratt, Head of Centre via the Centre's office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Head of Centre should be addressed to the Clerk of the Board of Trustees, via the Centre's office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. Complaints about the Clerk to the Board of Trustees should be sent to the Chair of the Board of Trustees, complaints about individual Trustee Members should be sent to the Chair of the Board of Trustees and complaints about the whole Board of Trustees should be addressed to Clare Dulson Business Manager, via the Centre's office who will enlist the help of another governing body to investigate the complaint. Please mark all correspondence as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, please refer to Complaint Form – **Appendix 2**, which can be found in the list of Appendices at the end of this policy. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the Centre's office. You can also ask third party organisations like Citizen's Advice Bureau to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Centre's Head or Chair of the Board of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Wheels VLS Centre would wish to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation,
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better,
- An assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur,
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made,
- An undertaking to review the Centre's policies in light of the complaint,
- An apology

Stage 1 - Informal Concerns

1. Concerns

Most concerns, where a Parent/Carer seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching, disciplinary matters or issues outside the classroom. Parents/carers should raise the concern initially with the Centre Office personally, via telephone, website (Contact Us – tab) or email as appropriate (**Appendix 2**). It is usual for concerns to be resolved very quickly, within 24 hours. However, should this not be possible then the Centre will do everything possible to ensure that informal concerns are resolved within 10 working days of being raised.

2. Unresolved Concerns

A concern, which has not been resolved by informal means, can be notified as a formal complaint in accordance with Stage 2 below, via the Parental Concern/Complaint Form (**Appendix 2**).

3. Record of Concerns

In the case of concerns raised under Stage 1 of this procedure, the only record of the concern and its' resolution will be file notes by the person dealing with the complaint and/or file correspondence between the person raising the concern and the respondent. Informal concerns are recorded on a Concern/Complaint Log document (**Appendix 3**) as a 'Concern'. This will then be entered onto the Centre's Concern/Complaint Register (**Appendix 4**).

Stage 2 - Formal Complaints

4. Notification

An unresolved concern under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a more serious dissatisfaction with some aspect of the Centre's policies, procedures, management or administration must be made to Jason Garratt, Centre's Head, using the Parental Concern/Complaint Form (**Appendix 2**), via the Centre's office.

(NB: If the complaint relates to Centre's Head or a member of the Board of Trustees (including the Chair), a suitably skilled Trustee will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Centre's Head or member of the Board of Trustees must be made to the Centre's office.

If the complaint is:

- **about a member of the Board of Trustees including the Chair or**
- **the entire Board of Trustees**
- **the majority of the Board of Trustees**

Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Board of Trustees (possibly an independent Trustee/Governor through another local school). At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.)

5. Acknowledgement

The complaint will be acknowledged in writing normally within 3 working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays. The acknowledgement will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what action the complainant would like to see. The Centre's Head will also indicate the action that is being taken, the likely timescale for resolution and consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

NOTE: The Centre's Head may delegate the investigation to another member of the Centre's SLT but not the decision to be taken.

6. Investigation and Resolution

During the investigation, the Centre's Head (or 'investigating officer') will:

- If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

7. Outcome

The aim is to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint within 15 working days from the receipt of the complaint. Please note that any complaint received during a Centre holiday or within 15 working days of the end of term or half term may take longer to resolve. If the Centre's Head is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions that Wheels VLS Centre will take to resolve the complaint.

The Centre's Head will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

8. Record of Complaints

Written records will be kept of any meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. A Concern/Complaints Log (**Appendix 3**) will be kept on file and then entered on the Centre's Concern/Complaint Register (**Appendix 4**).

9. Unresolved Complaints

Where the complainant is not satisfied with the response to their complaint, they may have their complaint considered by an Independent Complaints Panel.

Stage 3 – Complaint Heard by the Board of Trustees Complaints Panel

10. Request

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a meeting with members of the Board of Trustees Complaints Panel, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, Trustees available. This is the final stage of the Centre's complaints procedure.

A request for a complaint to be heard by the Complaints Panel (an appeal) must be made in writing to the Centre's office within 10 working days of the date of the Centre's decision made at Stage 2.

This request should be made to Clare Dulson – Business Manager (by letter or e-mail) including a copy of the original written complaint/s and also indicating which matters remain unresolved. No new complaint/s may be included. Upon receipt of the written complaint it will be forwarded to the Clerk to the Board of Trustees Appeals Panel.

11. Acknowledgement

Where an appeal is received, the Clerk to the Board of Trustees will record the date received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within three working days. (Requests outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply).

12. Invitation to the Panel Hearing

The Clerk to the Board of Trustees will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within twenty working days of the Stage 3 request. If this is not possible, the Centre will provide an anticipated date and keep the Complainant informed. If the Complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Centre will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the Complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

13. Panel Membership

The Complaints and Appeals Committee will consist of at least three Trustees with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Committee. If there are fewer than three Trustees from Wheels VLS Centre available, the centre will source additional, independent trustees/governors through a local school in order to make up the committee.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the Complainant's needs. 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, we would not encourage either party to bring along legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

14. The Panel Hearing (See Appendix 5 - Checklist for a Panel Hearing)

At least 10 working days before the meeting, the Centre 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 five working days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least three working days before the date of 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 complaint/s at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 2 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations will not be 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 the minutes taken.

15. The Remit of the Complaints Panel

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

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold 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.
- Recommend changes to the Centre's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not reoccur.

The aim of the hearing, which will be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Centre and the complainant. The Chair of the Panel will ensure that the proceedings are as informal as possible.

16. Notification of the Panel's Decision

The Chair of the Committee will provide the Complainant and Wheels VLS Centre with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five working days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Wheels VLS Centre.

If the complaint is:

- Jointly about the Chair and/or member/s of the Board of Trustees or
- The entire Board of Trustees or
- The majority of the Board of Trustees

Stage 3 will be heard by a committee of independent Trustees or Governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions that Wheels VLS Centre will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

17. Record Keeping

Wheels Vocational & Life Skills Centre will keep a record of all complaints, appeals, decisions and recommendations of the Complaints Panel Hearing on the Centre's Concerns/Complaints Register (**Appendix 4**). All written records will include the required information set out in the standards and kept securely in the Centre's Main Office, in lockable, storage containers with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are

entitled to access.

Next Steps

If the Complainant believes the Centre has not handled their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decision made by Wheels VLS Centre. They will consider whether Wheels VLS Centre has adhere to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complain to the Department for Education online at www.education.gov.uk/contactus or by telephone on 03700002288 or by writing to Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.

Managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Wheels VLS Centre is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our Centre. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Wheels VLS Centre defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainants contact with the Centre, such as, if the complainant:

- 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 Centre's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on the Centre's 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

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the Centre that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, or email), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Centre's Head or Chair of the Board of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Centre's Head will write to the complainant explain that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Wheels VLS Centre causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the Centre.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

All panels considering complaints must be clerked. The Clerk would be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- Set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- Collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- Meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- Record the proceedings;
- Notify all parties of the panel's decisions.

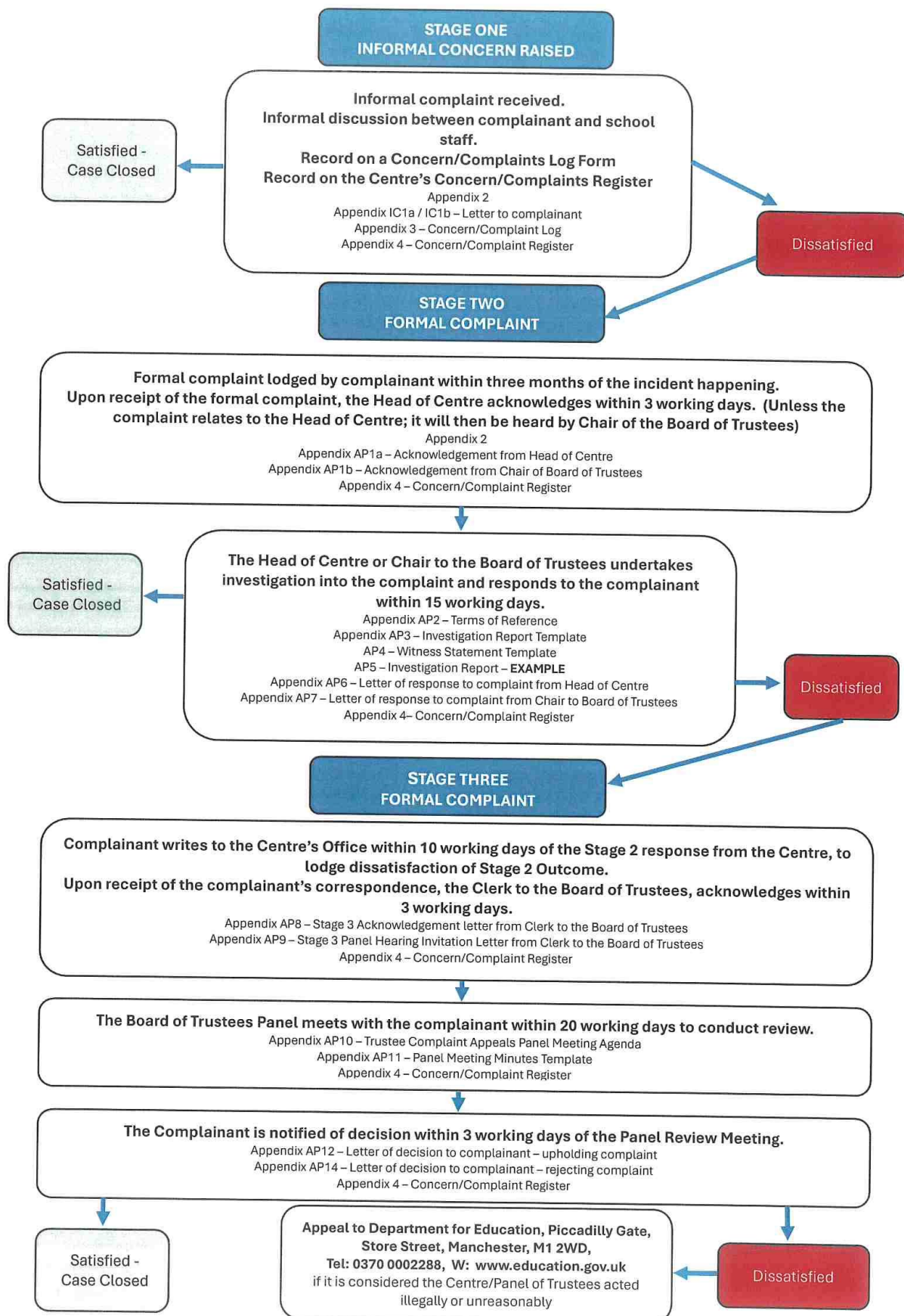
The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- The remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- The issues are addressed;
- Key findings of fact are made;
- Parents/carers or others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- The panel is open minded and acting independently;
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- Written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Appendix 1:	Summary of Dealing with Complaints Flowchart
Appendix 2:	Parental Concern / Complaint Form
Appendix 3:	Concern / Complaint Log
Appendix 4:	Concerns / Complaints Register
Appendix 5:	Checklist for a Panel Hearing

APPENDIX 1 - Summary of Dealing with Concerns and Complaints



APPENDIX 2 – Parental Concern/Complaint Form

WHEELS VOCATIONAL & LIFE SKILLS CENTRE - COMPLAINT FORM

Please complete and return to Clare Dulson (Business Manager) who will acknowledge receipt and explain the complaints process.

Your Name: _____

Pupil's Name: (if relevant): _____

Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant): _____

Address: _____

Tel No (day): _____ **Tel No (evening):** _____

Email: _____

Please give brief details of your complaint:

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint? (Who did you speak to and what was their response?)

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details

Signature: _____ (Complainant)

Date: _____

Official Use:	
Date Acknowledgement Sent:	
Acknowledged By:	
Complaint Referred To:	Date:

Wheels Vocational & Life Skills Centre

“Wheels, putting young people first”

Concern / Complaint Log

Date of complaint:			
Source of complaint			
Parent/carer (in writing, including email)		Staff member	
Parent/carer (in person)		Anonymous	
Parent/carer (phone call)		Other (please specify)	

Nature of complaint	
Please tick all welfare requirements that relate to complaint	
Safeguarding and promoting children's welfare	
Safeguarding/Child Protection (Consider if MASH referral required)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allegation against a staff member (Must be reported to LADO)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Missing/Lost Child	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special Educational Needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Equality of opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medication/Illness/Infection	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accident/Injury	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food and drink	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smoking	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behaviour management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child's learning, development or progress	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Suitable people	
Safe recruitment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adults looking after children are suitable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alcohol and other substances	<input type="checkbox"/>
Qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staffing arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Suitable premises	
Risk assessment – outdoor and indoor spaces furniture, equipment and toys	<input type="checkbox"/>
Premises and security	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Centre Data/Information	
Complaints Procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information and Records	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please give details of the complaint:

How it was dealt with?

Internal investigation

Reported to MASH

Reported to LADO

Reported to Police

Investigation by other agencies (please specify)

Please give details of any internal and/or external investigation

Actions and outcomes	
Internal actions	
No action	
Actions imposed or agreed with other agencies	
Please give details of internal and/or external actions and outcomes	

Person completing the Complaint/Incident/Allegation record	
Name of Recorder:	Date completed:
Position:	This record should be kept for at least 3 years from the above date. All correspondence will be kept in the Centre's Main Office securely, in lockable, storage containers with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to access.
Signature:	

Parent notified of outcome	YES / NO
Has a copy of this record been shared with parents? Ensure personal information is redacted/anonymised in any version given to parent/carers	YES / NO
Print name of parent/carer this record was shared with	
Signature of parent/carer was shared with	
Date this record was shared with parent/carer	

APPENDIX 4 – Concern/Complaint Register

CONCERN/COMPLAINT REGISTER

Log No	Is this a Concern / Complaint	Name	Date Received	How was concern/complaint made	Nature of concern/complaint	Person dealing with concern/complaint
1	Concern					
2	Complaint					
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						

CONCERN/COMPLAINT REGISTER

[illegible]

Appendix 5 - Checklist for a Panel Hearing

- The hearing is as informal as possible.
- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Centre Head may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Centre Head is then invited to explain the Centre's actions and be followed by the Centre's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Centre Head and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Head Teacher is then invited to sum up the Centre's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the Panel decides on the issues.
- The Chair explains that both parties will hear from the Panel within a set timescale.