

GRIEVANCE POLICY

Date approved by Trustees of Ventrus Multi Academy Trust	18th May 2023
Review Period	2 Years

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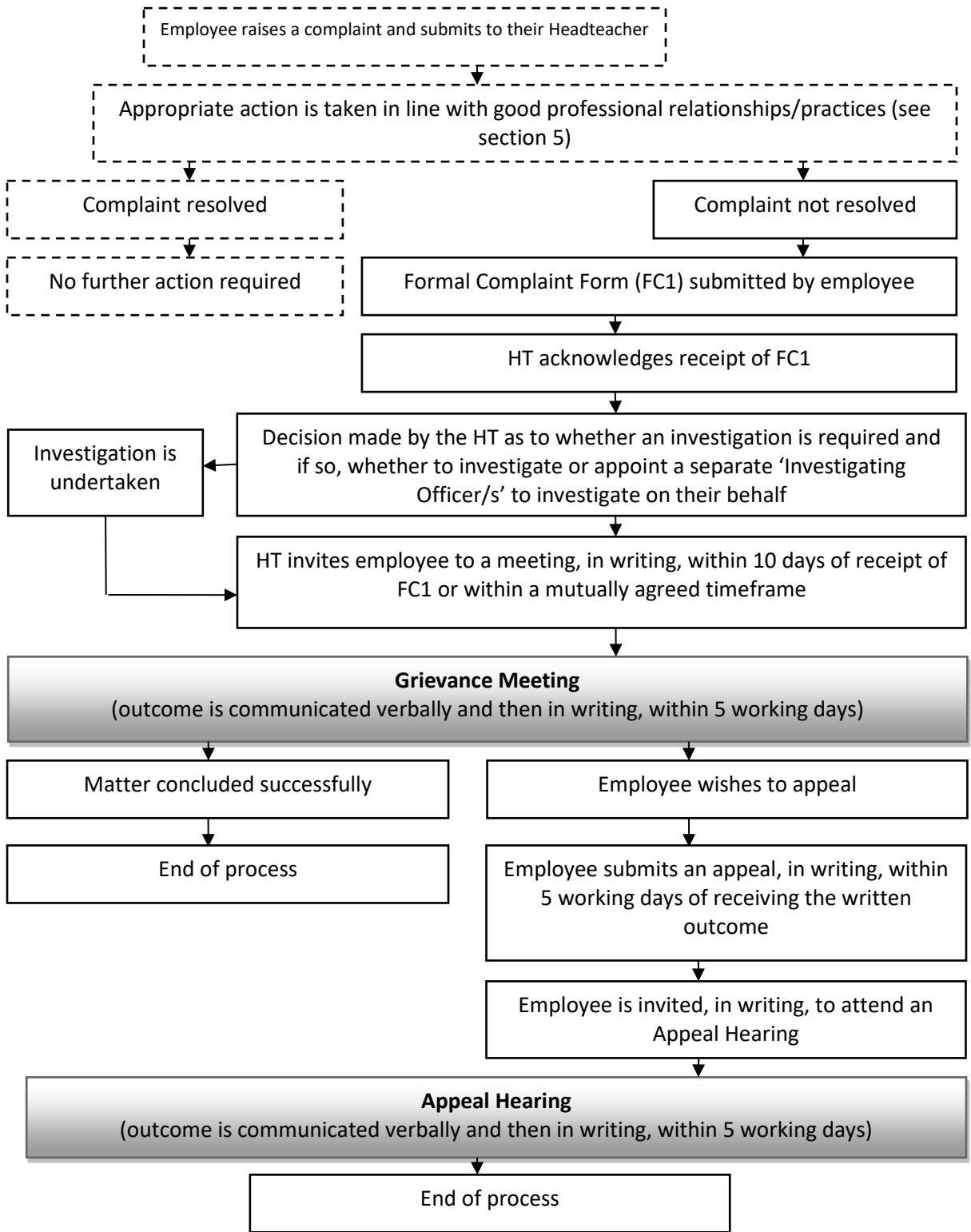
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PROCEDURE FLOW CHART

HT = Headteacher

For employees in the Network Support Team (NST), including the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) read 'Line Manager' instead of Headteacher, as indicated in section 3

Could the allegation constitute a 'protected disclosure' under the Whistleblowing Policy (see section 3)



POLICY AND PRINCIPLES

1. DEFINITION

A grievance is a concern, problem or complaint raised by an employee regarding their work, working conditions or relationships with work colleagues.

This policy does not cover issues raised by people who are not or have not been employed by the Trust. Such issues will be handled under our Complaints Procedure.

It is at the absolute discretion of the Trust whether or not to allow former employees to use this policy to raise grievances related to their employment.

A grievance raised by a former employee will only be heard under this policy up to 3 months, less one day, from the individual's last date of employment with the Trust.

Former employees may not use this policy to raise issues that were conclusively dealt with by the Trust prior to the termination of their employment.

Where a grievance raised by a former employee is heard under this policy, the term 'employee' in the procedures shall be taken to mean 'former employee' and references to the 'Headteacher' shall be taken to mean their Headteacher at the time they left the Trust.

2. PURPOSE

This policy should be used to manage a complaint from an employee about their work and/or working conditions and/or a work colleague, fairly and without delay. For the avoidance of doubt, this document does not form part of your terms and conditions of employment.

3. APPLICATION AND EXCLUSIONS

This policy is based on good practice to ensure a consistent and effective approach. The application of this policy will be fair, equitable, objective and will not discriminate either directly or indirectly on the grounds of an employee's sex, age, disability, gender re-assignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy, maternity status, race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

For employees in the Network Support Team (NST), read 'Line Manager' instead of Headteacher.

This policy:

1. does not cover complaints from or about Trustees unless the complaint relates to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). In other cases, the relevant Complaints Procedure should be used
2. may only be used by individual employees; group complaints will not be accepted. This may however be varied by mutual agreement and individual complaints may be looked at collectively where appropriate
3. does not apply to those employed by other organisations, employed under another organisations' terms and conditions of employment which includes a contractual grievance policy, casual workers or volunteers
4. is not for use by a Headteacher who has concerns and/or complaints about employees they manage. These concerns should be dealt with through the application of the appropriate HR policies, for example the Disciplinary or Capability Policy and Procedures.

The following matters are excluded from this policy because separate procedures exist:

1. Overpayments or pay issues
2. Evaluation and grading of jobs

3. Matters that are in the public interest and may constitute a 'protected disclosure' and are or maybe:
 - a) an unlawful or a criminal offence.
 - b) a breach of a legal obligation (but not a personal contractual breach unless such breach involves a matter of public interest).
 - c) a miscarriage of justice.
 - d) mistreatment or abuse of a client or a member of the public for whom the Trust has a responsibility.
 - e) in disregard of legislation governing health and safety at work.
 - f) seeking undue favour over a contractual matter or a job application; or against the Trust's Financial Regulations.
 - g) improper conduct or an unauthorised use of public funds.
 - h) actions which have led to or could lead to damage to the environment; or
 - i) an action which deliberately covers up information tending to show any of the above.

In these circumstances it would usually be appropriate to invoke the Ventrus Whistleblowing Policy instead of the Grievance Policy.

4. Selection for redundancy (see applicable Redundancy Policy)
5. Disciplinary and/or Capability issues (see Disciplinary and/or Capability Policy and Procedures)

4. TIME LIMITS

The time limits included in this policy may be varied by mutual agreement. The policy makes reference to a number of 'days' within which certain actions/events are to occur. A 'day' is defined as any Monday to Friday excluding public holidays as defined by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

If a complaint is raised during a period of Trust closure, the timeframes indicated in the policy will commence from the first day of the Trust being open. Where a complaint is raised immediately prior to a period of closure, the availability of any person(s) who may need to be interviewed as part of any investigation will be taken into consideration by both parties when mutually agreeing any required extension to the timeframes.

5. GOOD PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP/PRACTICES

It is the responsibility of all employees to take all reasonable steps to develop and maintain good working relationships with colleagues and to deal with workplace issues in a professional, practical and constructive manner.

Employees should try to resolve any difficulties at the earliest opportunity without having to use a formal process. This should be done in such a way as to have the minimum impact on the Trust, other work colleagues and to preserve working relationships.

Resolving issues in a sensible and sensitive way will require all parties to recognise their part in the issue/difficulty and how their behaviour may be contributing to the circumstances. Employees should be willing and open to looking at ways of resolving the issues without resorting to formal processes, for example by using:

- an informal setting to discuss the matter with the colleague
- the Headteacher or an appropriate colleague as a facilitator
- mediation

Employees should be able to resolve issues professionally and respectfully by agreeing that when discussions take place there should be:

- effective listening - so that each person fully understands the issues at hand and each other's view
- effective understanding so that each person is able to respond, knowing what the issues are
- a calm environment - no raised voices or inappropriate body language
- common ground – identifying and agreeing common understanding
- the taking of responsibility – each person should admit when they are wrong, if appropriate, and take steps to make professional relationships work

- agreed action – offering apologies if appropriate, agreeing the way forward and agreeing to meet again, if appropriate.

Every attempt should be made to resolve the issues informally. If the matter cannot be resolved by way of professional dialogue the formal process should be used.

Failure to foster good professional working relationships could, in certain circumstances, lead to a decision to terminate the employment of one or more parties involved on the grounds that substantial reasons exist that make appropriate working relationships impossible, and this is directly affecting the Trust. This may be an irretrievable breakdown in working relations or irresolvable personality differences between employees at work. This is known as dismissal for Some Other Substantial Reason (SOSR) and will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

6. BEING ACCOMPANIED

The Employment Relations Act 1999 determines that an employee has a statutory right to request to be accompanied at any Disciplinary or Grievance Hearing. To invoke that right an employee must make a reasonable request to the employer to be accompanied by either:

- a paid official from a recognised trade union/professional association
- an official of a trade union/professional association whom the union has reasonably certified, in writing, as having experience of, or as having received training in acting as an employee's companion at Disciplinary or Grievance Hearings
- an appropriate work colleague.

Friends/family members are not permitted unless they fall under the above criteria, and it is agreed as appropriate. It would not normally be reasonable for an employee to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union/professional association representative whose presence would prejudice the Hearing and/or was from a remote geographical location if someone suitable and willing was available on site.

If an employee's chosen representative is not available on the day proposed for the meeting, the employee can propose an alternative date within the following five days of the original proposed date.

The companion may address the meeting to put and summarise the employee's case, respond on their behalf, and confer with them. The companion does not have the right to answer questions on behalf of the employee, address the meeting if the employee does not wish it, or prevent the Trust from explaining its case.

7. NON ATTENDANCE

If an employee fails to attend a meeting through circumstances beyond their control, such as certified illness, an alternative time and date may be offered. Alternatively, they may submit a written statement or nominate a representative to attend on their behalf.

Where an employee is persistently unable or unwilling to attend the meeting without good cause, it will proceed in their absence and a decision based on the evidence available will be made.

PROCEDURE

8. FORMAL PROCESS

The employee must set out their complaint, the basis for it and the resolution they are seeking using the Formal Complaint Form (FC1) and should forward this to their Headteacher. Any documents relating to the complaint should also be submitted at this stage.

If the complaint is regarding the employee's Headteacher, the matter should be raised with the Headteacher's Line Manager.

Where an employee raises a complaint about a member of the NST, the Headteacher will submit the FC1 to the NST employee's line manager. In the case of a grievance against the CEO this should be submitted to the Chair of Trustees.

Receipt of the FC1 should be acknowledged in writing as soon as is reasonably possible. If there is a potential for the complaint to constitute a 'protected disclosure' under the Whistleblowing Policy, the Headteacher should seek advice from an ELT member or the Ventrus HR Business Partner (HRBP).

The parties may subsequently decide to resolve the complaint by means other than this policy, e.g. mediation. This decision must be confirmed in writing and will not preclude the employee from raising their complaint under this policy at a later date.

8.1 Investigation

Depending on the circumstances of the complaint, the Headteacher may decide that an investigation is necessary. The Headteacher can either undertake an investigation themselves or arrange for an appropriate person/s ('the Investigating Officer/s') to carry this out on their behalf and report back to them. The Headteacher will confirm with the Investigating Officer/s the extent to which they should gather information.

The Investigating Officer will conduct an investigation, which may involve:

- Reviews of relevant documents or policies
- Interviews with those involved
- Seeking relevant advice

The Investigating Officer/s should not have had any previous involvement in the circumstances of the complaint, no close relationship with any of the parties involved nor a vested interest.

8.2 The Responder

Where the complaint is related to the actions of another employee or body, for ease of reference and for the purposes of this policy, they will be known as the 'responder'. The responder should be informed of the complaint and given a copy of this policy. They should also be given the opportunity to respond to the complaint and be advised of the likely timescale of any investigation.

8.3 Grievance Meeting

The Investigation Officer will arrange a meeting within 10 days of receiving the FC1. This timescale can be extended by mutual agreement to allow additional time for information to be gathered, although it is important that there is no unreasonable delay. Consideration should be given to arranging for a suitable person to attend the meeting to take notes.

Prior to the meeting, the Investigation Officer will determine the appropriateness of sharing the information gathered and which parties to share this with.

It is important that the meeting allows for free flowing discussion and dialogue in an attempt to find an amicable solution to the complaint. The employee should be invited to re-state their complaint and how they would like to see it reasonably resolved.

The Investigation Officer will listen to all the points raised, consider any additional information gathered and then adjourn the meeting to make a decision. If a decision is reached, the Investigation Officer will confirm this at the meeting, will set out any action that will be taken to resolve the grievance, and inform the employee of their right to appeal, how to appeal, and the relevant timelines, if they are not satisfied with the outcome. If a decision cannot be made at the end of the meeting, the employee should be informed of the reason why and when a response may be expected.

The decision will be confirmed in writing, within five working days, setting out the key factors considered, the reason for the decision and what action was agreed to resolve the complaint. This letter will also detail the employee's right of appeal, the relevant timelines, and where to send the appeal, should the complaint not be fully resolved.

The Investigation Officer should also ensure that suitable feedback is given to the responder and that this is undertaken within a reasonable timeframe.

If, due to the complexity of the investigation or any other reasonable barrier, it is not possible to conduct the investigation within this time frame, the Investigating Officer/s (via the Headteacher) proactively inform the complainant of the updated time frames and reasons for delay.

9. APPEAL

If an employee wishes to appeal against the decision, they must do so in writing, stating the grounds for their appeal, within five working days of receiving the written response.

The appeal should be sent to the HRBP who will then arrange for the Appeal Hearing to take place.

The appeal should be heard without unreasonable delay. A minimum of five working days' notice will be given to allow for preparation. The employee will be notified of the time and place of the Appeal Hearing. The Hearing Chair may invite the Investigating Officer to provide evidence.

The decision will be given verbally to all parties at the end of the Appeal Hearing unless valid reasons exist not to do so. The decision will be confirmed in writing to the employee within five working days. An appeal is not a re-Hearing of all of the facts but to determine if the original decision was reasonable given the circumstances. The grievance process ends with the decision of the ELT member, depending on who has raised the grievance.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

10. HR ADVICE

The Ventrus HRBP can provide advice and support to any Headteacher/Line Manager/ELT member /Investigating Officer involved in the application of this policy at any stage. This includes attendance at meetings/Hearings where required.

11. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees have a contractual responsibility to carry out the requirements of their job satisfactorily, to ensure that their conduct is appropriate and that they have good professional working relationships with their colleagues.

Employees should bring to the attention of management any concerns/problems/complaints that arise in the course of their work so that they can be resolved fairly and promptly.

Employees involved in the investigation and resolution of complaints must participate appropriately and with due regard to the Code of Conduct.

12. MULTIPLE COMPLAINTS

If an employee raises multiple complaints relating to different issues, to avoid duplication of this policy and to aid a prompt resolution, the issues will be dealt with together, where possible.

13. VEXATIOUS/MALICIOUS COMPLAINTS

False or vexatious complaints will be taken very seriously and will be managed under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedures where it is clear that an employee has made an allegation(s) of this type against the Trust and/or another employee.

14. OVERLAPPING ISSUES

Where an employee raises a grievance whilst being managed under another policy e.g. Disciplinary, Capability, Managing Sickness Absence, the Headteacher should refer to the applicable policy and take appropriate action. Invoking the Grievance Policy does not necessarily mean that other processes will be put on hold.

15. MEDIATION

Mediation is a voluntary process, where trained mediators help people in dispute to attempt to reach an agreement. Mediation can be arranged via an ELT member or the HRBP.

16. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any parties affected by or involved in the application of this policy will be expected to maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality. Breaches of confidentiality will be taken seriously, especially if they hinder the application of the policy or the resolution of an issue. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in action being taken under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

Disclosure of information may also be a breach of the Data Protection Act and may lead to action being taken under the provisions of this legislation in addition to action being taken under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

17. RECORDING OF INFORMATION

A written record must be made of all interviews and meetings held during the application of this policy. Those involved in each meeting will be provided with a copy of any records made. The Headteacher will ensure there is a record of the process which should include all statements, records and evidence. All records will be retained confidentially, securely and in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

18. SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES

Employees are encouraged to seek support from their trade union/professional association in the first instance. Procedural guidance relating to this policy is available from the Ventrus HRBP.

Where a referral to the Trust's Occupational Health or counselling service is necessary, this should be made by the employee's Headteacher. The HRBP can provide support and advice for these referrals.

19. ADOPT THE POLICY

This policy was adopted by the Trustees of Ventrus Multi Academy Trust in April 2016.

20. CONSULTATION

This policy is a Trust version of a policy which was subject to consultation with trade unions/professional associations. It will apply to all employees where this policy has been adopted. Should the Trustees wish to make material changes to this model policy, the required consultation must be undertaken with the County Officers of the recognised trade unions/professional associations.

This policy supersedes all previous Grievance Policies and Procedures.

APPENDIX 1 - POLICY HISTORY

Policy Date		Summary of change	Contact	Version/ Implementation Date	Review Date
April 2016		Revised policy for academy schools based on LA policy previously consulted upon with trade unions	HR ONE	14 April 2016	
Mar 18	V1.0	Revised policy to reflect the Trust’s Leadership structure and terminology	SL Updated Nov 17 Contact: SS	2018	2020
Apr 2021	V1.0	- Section 1 - Updated - Updated to reflect Acceptable Behaviour Policy no longer in use, now refer to Code of Conduct (KB 19.4.21)	SS updated Apr 21	2021	2023
May 2021	V1.0	Page 3 – Flowchart amended 8.3 – Replace Headteacher with Investigating Officer	KB updated following recommendation from Trustees	July 2021	
May 2023	V1.0	No changes	SS	May 2023	May 2025

APPENDIX 2 - FORMAL COMPLAINT FORM (FC1)**PART A:** To be completed by the employee raising the complaint

Employee Name	
Job Title	
Work base	
Employee contact details Address for correspondence	
Telephone	
Mobile	
Email address	
Name of Headteacher (Line Manager if NST)	
Name of Representative (Professional Association/Trade Union)	
Address for correspondence	
Telephone	
Mobile	
Email address	
Details of complaint <i>Detail your complaint here including what you have done to resolve this matter by way of professional dialogue and explain why this has not resolved the situation to your satisfaction. Alternatively, state why the circumstances are so serious and/or complex that informal resolution by professional dialogue cannot be attempted or would be unsuccessful. Attach any relevant supporting evidence where necessary.</i>	
Outcome you are seeking <i>State the outcome that you are seeking and specifically what action or actions, in your view, are needed to resolve your complaint satisfactorily.</i>	
<i>Continue on a separate sheet if necessary</i>	
Employee signature	
Date	

You should now give this form to your Headteacher or Headteacher's Line Manager and keep a copy for your records.

PART B: To be completed by the Headteacher (Line Manager if NST) considering the complaint



Name of Headteacher (Line Manager if NST)	
Job title	
Service/School	
Contact Details	
Telephone	
Mobile	
Email address	
Date complaint received	
<p>Summary of action taken and outcome <i>The employee should be written to following the Grievance Meeting confirming the outcome of their complaint, any actions that will be taken and their right of appeal. Attach a copy of the letter and any notes taken at the Grievance Meeting to this form.</i></p> <p><i>Continue on a separate sheet if necessary</i></p>	
Headteacher/ (Line Manager if NST) signature	
Date	