

TITLE	VERSION
Comments and Complaints Policy	5

APPROVAL BODY	DATE	REVIEW DATE
Board of Governors	August 24	August 25

LEAD PERSON	Director of Operations
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POLICY STATEMENT

This document sets out VLUK's comments and complaints policy and some of the associated procedures that underpin them. It should be used by all associated parties who wish to make a comment or complaint.

BACKGROUND

VLUK is a National Independent Training Provider, delivering education in the 16-19 FE sector. It is part of The Oxford Virtual Education Group. VLUK is led by a Chief Executive Officer, accountable to a Board of Governors and Group Chief Executive Officer and supported by an Executive team and a Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Accountable to the SLT is a layer of middle management located throughout the country. The Middle Leadership team is responsible for tutors and enrichment staff.

PURPOSE

VLUK's Comments and Complaints Policy provides the structure within which learners and anyone who is dissatisfied or satisfied with the organisation can bring their comments to the attention of the organisation. The structure also assists staff to effectively deal with complaints from learners, parents, customers, employers, contractors and other interested parties. VLUK welcomes feedback to enable us to improve our services. As an organisation constantly striving to undertake continuous improvement, it also allows us to monitor and share successful practice and learn where improvements can be made to the learner journey.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff at VLUK from Governors, Senior Leadership Team, Middle Leaders, Tutors, Support Staff, learners, parents/carers and confirms the approach to comments and complaints.

DEFINITIONS

Complaint - this could be an objection to something that is unfair, unacceptable, or not up to the required standard.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Governors	The Governing Board or a delegated committee review and challenge the effectiveness of the internal controls and the management of risk detailed in this policy.
Chief Executive Officer	Overall responsibility and oversight of this policy, ensuring resources are used effectively and appropriately.
Lead Person	Responsible for the implementation and delivery of this policy, ensuring the policy aligns with regulatory requirements and best practice.

All Line Managers	Responsible for ensuring all line managed employees are aware of and follow this policy.
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POLICY - THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

STAGE 1 - INFORMAL

It is recognised that some comments/concerns are raised informally, and these can and should be dealt with immediately. An immediate telephone call can occur to acknowledge the comment/complaint within 48 hours. An informal comment/complaint should be raised directly with the relevant member of staff within 5 working days of when the incident occurred. Any such concerns should then be raised promptly and directly with the individual against whom there is a concern where relevant. VLUK aims to resolve informal concerns quickly and effectively.

If concerns are not satisfactorily resolved in this way complainants should follow VLUK's formal Complaints process as outlined below.

STAGE 2 - FORMAL

The formal procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COMPLAINANT

If the complaint is not resolved at the informal stage, or the complainant does not wish to follow the informal complaint process, they should:

- Communicate their complaint in writing using the VLUK Learner Complaints Form, if applicable, to Director of Operations, Gemma Halsey gemma.halsey@vluk.org. To speak to someone in person about a complaint please contact Gemma Halsey on 01793 701441
- Bring their complaint to the attention of VLUK within 2 weeks of the incident occurring.
- Explain the concern as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date.

RESPONSIBILITY OF VLUK

VLUK responds to any complaint fairly and promptly. A complainant can expect to:

- Receive an initial response within 48 hours of receipt of a formal complaint
- Have the complaint investigated and your complaint is looked into and receive an initial response within 10 working days.
- Receive a further, more detailed response to be sent on conclusion of a full investigation and within a maximum of 3 weeks from the date of the receipt of the complaint, if possible.

In addition:

- A complainant may be offered a meeting with the parties involved if appropriate.
- All informal and formal complaints are logged on the VLUK central complaints log.
- Records of complaints are retained for a period of 2 years following resolution and closure of the complaint. After 2 years all information relating to the complaint is deleted.

POLICY - APPEALS AND ESCALATION

APPEAL

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint at stage 2 they may appeal to Dominic Anderson, the Chief Operating Officer. Any appeal must be submitted within 20 working days from receipt of the complaint response. The appeal should be sent, in writing, to dominic.anderson@vluk.org.

ESCALATION 1

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal they may escalate to Rob Johnson, the Chief Executive Officer. The appeal must be submitted within 10 working days from receipt of the appeal response. Your escalation should be sent, in writing, to rob.johnson@vluk.org.

ESCALATION 2

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the escalation, they may further escalate to the Chair of Governors, Eric Mason. The escalation must be submitted within 10 working days from receipt of the escalation response. The appeal should be sent, in writing, to the Chair of Governors via the Clerk, marion.johnson@vluk.org

If the VLUK complaints procedure has been fully exhausted, a complainant holds written evidence of this, and remains dissatisfied, they may contact an external agency, such as the ESFA.

A complainant can also contact ESFA if they are being prevented from exhausting the complaints procedure.

HOW TO COMPLAIN TO ESFA

The ESFA only accepts complaints in writing, by email or letter, except where they are required to make reasonable adjustments. Please let them know if this applies, either through a third party or by calling them, and they will arrange for someone to handle the complaint accordingly.

If you have difficulties in providing details in writing or if you are under 18, they will consider complaints made on your behalf by a third party. You will need to confirm that they can communicate with that third party on your behalf. If the complaint is on behalf of more than one person, they will need written permission from everyone.

You should email complaints to complaints.esfa@education.gov.uk, or put them in a letter to:

Customer Service Team,
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

When you contact the ESFA about your complaint, you will need to provide them with the following:

- Your name or the name of our organisation.
- Details of what your complaint is, together with the relevant documents.
- Evidence that you have fully exhausted our complaints procedure, including any appeals process (for example, written correspondence confirming the outcome).
- Permission to disclose details of your complaint to us.
- If you are acting on behalf of a learner, evidence that you have their permission to do so.

The ESFA can only investigate on behalf of learners whose courses they fund. They may ask you for further information to help them confirm this.

POLICY - CONFIDENTIALITY

VLUK keeps a complainant informed of progress and how we are handling the information provided under this Complaints Procedure. Where an investigation is required, information may be shared with other VLUK staff members or external third parties. Before sharing information, VLUK informs the complainant of this, unless there were exceptional circumstances, for example, where doing so could pose a risk of harm to the complainant or others. At all times complying with GDPR policy.

In the case of young people under the age of 18 raising a complaint, depending on the nature of the complaint, VLUK may be obliged to inform their parent/carer.

POLICY - MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Complaints and comments are an important tool which, alongside other data, allows VLUK to learn about our services and how we provide them. Complaint information is considered on a regular basis by the Director of Operations. Wherever possible the data is to be used to improve and develop our service.

COMPLAINTS

NA

REFERENCES

NA

SIGNATORIES



Chief Executive Officer
1st August 2024



Chair of Governors
1st August 2024

LEARNER COMPLAINT FORM

Informal Stage 1

Before completing this form, learners are advised to follow Stage 1 of the complaints procedure and initially try to rectify the issue prior to submitting a formal complaint.

Formal Stage 2

Learners are required to complete this form and forward it to gemma.halsey@vluk.org.

Name:			
Address:			
Email address:			
Contact number:			
Date complaint submitted:			
Course:			
Campus:			
Describe the nature of your complaint as fully as possible:			
Please attach an additional sheet if necessary.			
Signature of complainant:		Date:	