Virtual Learning uk

TITLE	VERSION
Comments and Complaints Policy 2026-2027	6

APPROVAL BODY	DATE	REVIEW DATE
Board of Governors	August 26	August 27

LEAD PERSON	Director of Operations

POLICY STATEMENT

This document sets out VLUK's comments and complaints policy and some of the associated procedures that underpin it. It should be used by all associated parties who wish to make a comment or complaint. We view feedback, comments, and complaints as critical mechanisms for continuous quality improvement. This policy provides a transparent, fair, and prompt framework for learners, parents/carers and external stakeholders to voice concerns, share feedback, and resolve issues effectively.

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/carers, customers, 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.

It covers all aspects of VLUK's operations, including teaching and learning, administrative services, facilities, learner support, and staff conduct.

Note on Exclusions:

- **Academic Appeals:** Issues regarding qualification assessment decisions, grading, or end-point assessment results must be addressed through the *VLUK Assessment Decisions Appeals Policy*.
- **Safeguarding / Prevent Concerns:** Any complaint involving child protection, safeguarding, or radicalisation must be escalated immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in line with the *VLUK Safeguarding Policy*.
- **Whistleblowing:** Disclosures made in the public interest regarding malpractice or unlawful conduct are managed under the *VLUK Whistleblowing Policy.*

If a complainant cannot submit in writing due to a disability, age, or language barrier, complaints may be made verbally by calling 01753 362 248 or via a nominated representative.

DEFINITIONS

Feedback / Comment: Suggestions, compliments, or general opinions provided to help VLUK improve services.
Informal Concern: An issue raised directly with local staff or tutors, intended for immediate local resolution.
Formal Complaint: A formal statement of dissatisfaction regarding an action, standard of service, or lack of action by VLUK that requires investigation and resolution.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Governors	Maintains ultimate oversight of complaints management, ensuring internal controls are effective, monitoring trend analysis, and scrutinising compliance.
Chief Executive Officer	Accountable for organisational culture, ensuring adequate resourcing.
Lead Person	Responsible for the operational management of the complaints log, assigning investigating officers, tracking resolution timelines, and driving continuous improvement.
Staff and Line Managers	Responsible for resolving informal concerns promptly, escalating formal matters appropriately, and ensuring learners understand how to access this policy if required.

POLICY - THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

STAGE 1 - INFORMAL

We encourage individuals to raise concerns at the earliest opportunity with the person directly responsible.
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 2 working days. 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. If the complainant feels uncomfortable raising the matter directly, or if informal resolution is unsuccessful, they may also proceed to Stage 2.

STAGE 2 - FORMAL

If a concern cannot be resolved informally, or due to the severity of the matter, a formal complaint should be submitted.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COMPLAINANT

- Communicate their complaint in writing to Director of Operations, Gemma Halsey gemma.halsey@vluk.org.
- Bring their complaint to the attention of VLUK within 3 months of the incident occurring.
- Explain the concern as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date.
- If the complaint directly involves the Director of Operations, it must be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer. If it involves the CEO, it must be addressed to the Chair of Governors.

RESPONSIBILITY OF VLUK

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

- Acknowledgement sent in writing within 2 working days of receipt.
- An independent Investigating Manager will review evidence, interview relevant parties, and assess the facts impartially
- A complainant may be offered a meeting with the parties involved if appropriate.
- A formal written outcome letter explaining the findings and actions taken will be issued within 10 to 15 working days of receipt. If an investigation requires further time, the complainant will be notified in writing with an updated target date.

POLICY - APPEALS AND ESCALATION

APPEAL

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint at stage 2 they may appeal the decision.
Appeals must be submitted in writing within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome via email to Rob Johnson, the Chief Executive Officer, stating clearly the grounds for appeal (e.g., failure to follow procedure, new evidence, or an unreasonable outcome).
The appeal will be reviewed by an Appeal Panel consisting of the Chief Executive Officer (or delegated Senior Executive) and an Independent Governor or another senior member of staff.
A final written decision will be issued within 15 working days of the appeal receipt. This concludes VLUK's internal complaints procedure

ESCALATION

If all internal stages have been fully exhausted and the complainant remains dissatisfied with how the complaint was handled, they may escalate the matter to external oversight bodies.
Please Note: External bodies (such as the DfE) will not usually investigate a complaint until the provider's internal complaints process has been fully exhausted, unless there is evidence of an unreasonable delay. The DfE will generally only investigate whether VLUK correctly followed its own published procedures and acted reasonably. DfE will not normally re-investigate the original complaint unless procedural failure is identified. For vocational/qualification delivery complaints, complainants may also access their respective Awarding Organisation's external complaints procedure once internal processes are exhausted.

Department for Education (DfE)

Complaints regarding DfE funded delivery should be submitted via the official government portal or by post:

- **Online Portal:** https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/

POLICY - CONFIDENTIALITY

All complaints will be handled in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

- Personal details and investigation records will remain confidential, shared strictly on a need-to-know basis.
- For learners under 18 years of age, parent/carer involvement may occur depending on safeguarding and duty-of-care requirements.
- Complaint logs and related documentation will be retained securely for 6 years following closure to comply with DfE, legal, and regulatory standards, after which data will be securely destroyed.

UNREASONABLE OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

While VLUK is committed to resolving complaints fairly and transparently, we have a duty of care to protect the health, safety, and well-being of our staff and will not tolerate abusive, aggressive, or unreasonably persistent behavior. Where a complainant's conduct—such as refusing to cooperate, making excessive demands, or using offensive language—hinders the investigation process or unfairly burdens staff, VLUK reserves the right to take proportionate action. Following an initial written warning, the Chief Executive Officer may apply formal communication restrictions, such as limiting contact to a designated single point of contact, restricting communication to written format only (subject to reasonable adjustments), or declining further correspondence on matters where internal procedures have already been fully exhausted.

POLICY - MONITORING AND EVALUATION

VLUK evaluates all complaints to identify systematic trends, root causes, and learning opportunities.

- The Director of Operations maintains a central, confidential Complaints Log detailing timelines, themes, and corrective actions.
- Anonymised annual summaries are presented to the Senior Leadership Team and the Board of Governors to ensure accountability, drive operational improvements, and improve the overall learner journey.

COMPLAINTS

NA

REFERENCES

Equality Act 2010
UK GDPR / Data Protection Act 2018
DfE Complaints Guidance for Post-16 Providers
Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)

SIGNATORIES



Chief Executive Officer
1st August 2026



Chair of Governors
1st August 2026