



COMPLAINTS POLICY.

1. Summary

HFL Education is committed to providing high-quality services and working in an open and accountable way. This policy outlines our approach to responding to complaints about our services.

2. Our aims

- Complaints will be dealt with honestly, politely and in confidence.
- Complaints will be looked into thoroughly and fairly with every effort being made to resolve the issue(s) raised.
- Complaints will be dealt with in a timely way. Timescales for dealing with complaints are specified in sections 6 and 7 of this document.
- Where appropriate, updates on the progression of a complaint will be given.
- We will learn from mistakes and aim to improve our services.
- Our Complaints Policy and Procedure will be regularly reviewed.

3. Introduction

This policy sets out our key principles and accountabilities in relation to receiving and responding to a qualifying formal complaint directly from users and commissioners of our services.

In the event of a complaint about our service being directed to Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), the complaint will be acknowledged, with a response to the effect that the matter has been passed to us for a response. Our timescale for responding will start from the date we receive the complaint.

4. Scope

This policy applies exclusively to organisations or individuals who directly commission and receive services from HFL Education. It sets out the process for managing and responding to complaints about those services.

This policy does not cover:

- Actions undertaken by HFL Education on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council, which are subject to Hertfordshire County Council's complaints procedures.
- Complaints from parents, members of the community or other third parties regarding actions or decisions taken by schools, trusts or settings, including where those actions or decisions have been informed by advice or guidance from HFL Education. Responsibility for such decisions rests with the commissioning organisation, and the relevant organisation's complaints procedure applies.
- Complaints from governors, former governors, employees or former employees of schools, trusts or settings relating to actions taken by their employer, including where those actions have been informed by advice or guidance from HFL Education. Responsibility for such decisions rests with the commissioning organisation, and the relevant organisation's complaints procedure applies. Where appropriate, HFL Education may provide information to the commissioning organisation to support its consideration of the matter.
- Any complaint from a third party who does not hold a direct contractual or service relationship with HFL Education, including where that individual has had contact with, provided information to, or otherwise engaged with HFL Education as part of work commissioned by another organisation. HFL Education may, at its discretion, consider whether the information raised identifies a safeguarding, data protection, service quality or contractual issue that should be reviewed internally or with the commissioning organisation.

For clarity, participation in, or contact with, HFL Education as part of services commissioned by another organisation does not constitute receipt of services for the purposes of this policy.

5. Policy

A concern is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction that may be resolved informally without the need for a formal written complaint response. A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about a service, product or employee that the complainant wishes to be handled through our formal complaints process. Where there is ambiguity, our team are trained to check whether the person raising the issue wishes it to be treated as a concern or as a formal complaint.

We recognise that there may be occasions when a customer is dissatisfied with the service they have received from us. In these circumstances, the person or organisation concerned will be made aware of our published Complaints Policy & Procedure.

We place great emphasis on responding to and resolving any complaint thoroughly and courteously. Therefore, when a complaint has been made, the complainant can expect the issue to be fully investigated and to be informed of the outcome.

In some cases, an individual may seek to make a complaint on behalf of another person. In these circumstances, we will require the individual's clear consent confirming that the third party is authorised to act on their behalf, before HFL can provide a response.

We do not normally respond to anonymous complaints because we may be unable to establish whether the person raising the complaint is entitled to receive private or confidential information that a response is likely to contain. In exceptional circumstances, such as where the safety of a child or vulnerable adult may be compromised, HFL Education may still carry out an investigation, but would not be obliged to provide a response to an anonymous third party.

All information relating to a complaint will be handled confidentially and in accordance with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025. Information will only be shared with those who need access to it in order to investigate, manage, and respond to the complaint.

A copy of this policy will be made available on our website and where applicable, referenced elsewhere.

Making a complaint will not compromise the provision of any future services or support.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will report to the Board of Directors on complaints and how they have been handled as part of the CEO's Report, which is presented at each Board meeting.

6. Procedure for raising a concern or complaint

HFL Education operates a two-stage process for responding to concerns and complaints:

Stage 1: Raise a concern

A concern will be dealt with informally by an Officer or Manager directly within the relevant team or service area within 10 working days of receipt. We will seek to understand the issue, discuss the outcome being sought and resolve the matter as quickly and proportionately as possible. Concerns may be raised by contacting complaints@hfleducation.org. If the issue cannot be resolved informally, the matter will move to Stage 2.

Stage 2: Raise a formal complaint

Any user or commissioner of our services wishing to make a formal complaint about our service or an individual member of our staff can do so by completing the complaints form found on the HFL Education website (www.hfleducation.org). Complaints may also be submitted by email to complaints@hfleducation.org or by post to Customer Service Team, HFL Education Ltd, Bank House, Ground Floor, North Wing, Primett Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 3EE.

When making a formal complaint, it is important to set out the facts, to provide any relevant supporting information and to be specific about the desired outcome and any remedial action you think is required.

7. Procedure for responding to a formal complaint

Once a formal complaint has been received at Stage 2, it will be assigned to a Senior Manager, Head of Service, or Director of the relevant service area for investigation, depending on what the complaint entails, and who has already been involved. The acknowledgement, investigation and response to the complaint will also be overseen by a Complaints Manager. They will ensure that the formal complaint is investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner. As part of this process, the complainant may be contacted by the Senior Manager, Head of Service or Director investigating the complaint, to discuss the issue(s) further. They might also contact anyone else who may have relevant information. When their investigation and response is complete and has been checked a Complaints Manager, the reply will be sent out to the complainant.

We aim to resolve formal complaints within 20 working days of receipt wherever possible. If we are unable to resolve matters within this timescale, e.g. because the complaint involves staff who work term time only, we will contact you to explain why and advise what the revised timeframe for response will be. The formal complaint response will be sent by email or letter using the contact details provided when the complaint was submitted. The Stage 2 response will represent the conclusion of HFL Education's complaints process.

8. Managing Unreasonable Complaints

As an organisation with a not-for-profit ethos, HFL Education has a responsibility both to investigate reasonable complaints thoroughly and to ensure that the company uses its resources wisely. As a result, HFL Education may decline to consider, or may limit its response to, complaints that are abusive, vexatious, repetitive, excessively broad, or otherwise unreasonable.

Any decision to apply this discretion will be made carefully, fairly and proportionately. This will not prevent HFL Education from considering whether the matter raises a safeguarding, data protection, legal, regulatory or service quality issue that requires attention.

For transparency and oversight purposes, the number of complaints falling into this category will be reported to the Board of Directors at each Board meeting.

9. Data protection related complaints only

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after receiving our response to their data protection complaint, they may raise their concerns with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the UK's independent authority for data protection matters. We encourage individuals to give us the opportunity to address their concerns before approaching the ICO.

ICO contact details:

Website: [Information Commissioner's Office](#)

Helpline: 0303 123 1113

Address: Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

