



**Isle of Man  
Government**

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Department of Education, Sport and Culture  
Complaints Policy and Procedure

February 2024

## **Complaints Policy and Procedure**

The Department of Education Sport and Culture (the Department) vision is:

- to inspire, empower and provide learning, sporting and cultural opportunities that support all children, young people and adults;
- in striving for excellence, be a forward thinking, inclusive and nurturing organisation which enables everyone to achieve; enriching the lives of the community within the Isle of Man.

The Department is committed to providing the highest standard of service, however whilst we do everything we can to ensure our service users get the best possible service, we understand that sometimes we don't get things right.

This guide sets out the procedure the Department will follow when considering a complaint or concern.

If you feel dissatisfied with the quality of service or a decision made by a member of staff, please talk to the person concerned in the first instance as they may be able to resolve the matter immediately. The vast majority of complaints or concerns can be resolved informally at the first point of contact.

Complaints regarding staff will be dealt with under the Departments internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.

Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

### **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 opportunity. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure.

A complaint may be made:-

- in person, by telephone or in writing (including email)
- by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant and with their explicit consent.

### **Complaints received by schools outside of term time**

Complaints received by schools outside of term time will be considered to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

## **Anonymous Complaints**

It is usually proper to disregard anonymous complaints, unless somebody is prepared to substantiate them. However, if any child protection issues are raised within an anonymous complaint then this will be investigated.

## **Duplicate Complaints**

After a complaint has been resolved, a similar complaint may be received from a close contact or relative of the original complainant. If the complaint is about the same subject and there are no new aspects to consider, the new complainant can be informed that the complaint has already been considered and the process is complete.

## **Large Numbers of Complaints**

Occasionally, the Department may receive a large volume of complaints that are:-

- all based on the same subject
- from complainants not directly affected by an issue

In such circumstances, 'template' responses may be issued and either sent to complainants or posted on the relevant website.

## **Malicious Complaints**

Where a complaint has been received and investigated by the Department and in the opinion of the Department the complaint is malicious or vexatious, the Department will consider taking further action against the person who has submitted the complaint – see **Appendix 1** Vexatious Complaints, Unreasonable and Abusive Behaviour Policy.

## **Remedies**

When we get things wrong we will act to:

- Admit that a situation could have been handled differently;
- Accept responsibility and apologise;
- Explain what went wrong and why;
- Make any changes required;
- Learn lessons from mistakes and review any policies or practices, where appropriate.

The remedy applied needs to be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in service and take into account what redress within reason that people seek when they complain.

## **Unresolved Complaints**

If a complainant, once the above procedure has been concluded, is still not satisfied, under Section 27 of the Tynwald Commissioner for Administration Act 2011, a complainant has the right, depending on the nature of their complaint, to raise the matter with the Tynwald Commissioner for Administration whose contact details can be found [here](#).

## Resolution of Equality disputes

A separate process exists for the resolution of disputes under the Equality Act 2017, details of which can be found on the Department's website under '[Equality in Education](#)'.

## Timescales

Complaints should be made at the time of an incident or when it first comes to your attention, but not exceeding 12 months after a cause for complaint occurs. This time limit can be extended, provided you have good reasons for not making the complaint sooner and it's possible to complete a fair review. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame only if there are exceptional circumstances.

If, after 28 days, we have not heard from you after requesting further information evidence, or after our final response has been sent to you, we will close the complaint without further contacting you.

## Personal Information

The Department of Education, Sport and Culture is a data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data Protection (Application of GDPR) Order 2018 and the Data Protection (Application of LED) Order 2018, together with any regulations made under them (Manx Data Protection Legislation). In order to investigate your complaint fully it may be necessary to share some of your information with other Department staff. This will only be done if absolutely necessary and in relation to resolving your complaint. The Department's privacy notice can be viewed on the website <https://www.gov.im/about-the-government/departments/education-sport-and-culture/privacy-notice/> or a hard copy can be provided to you.

Complaints	
Use:	The Department of Education, Sport and Culture will use your information to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Correspond with you regarding your complaint.</li><li>• Correspond with service areas to seek resolution or clarification.</li></ul>
Data collected:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name</li><li>• Telephone number</li><li>• Address</li><li>• Email</li><li>• Details of your complaint</li></ul>
Retention period:	Complaint correspondence is kept for up to 12 months, unless subject to other proceedings.

## Equality

The Department of Education, Sport and Culture is committed to equal opportunities and our aim is to make our complaints policy easy to use and accessible to all of our service users. We will take steps to accommodate any reasonable adjustments you may request to enable you to access this policy or receive responses to complaints in other formats, and

provide such assistance as you may reasonably require. If you would like a response to a complaint in another format please advise us when you make your complaint. For more information about the Equality Act 2017 please click this [link](#).

## Section 1

### Who should you complain to? – Complaints not about the DESC Director/Divisional Leader

#### Stage 1

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, the first stage of the complaints process is to raise your complaint with the relevant DESC Director/Divisional Leader as listed below:

- Headteacher or Principal – Primary, Secondary School & UCM complaints
- Head of Sport, Recreation & Youth – Sport, Recreation & Youth Service complaints
- Head of Culture & Arts – Culture Division complaints
- Director of Strategic Advice for Education – Education, Advice & Support Division complaints
- Deputy Chief Officer– Policy, Strategy & Governance Division complaints

If you contact the DESC Director/Divisional Leader by email or in writing, please use the complaints form found in **Appendix 2**. This form should be sent to the relevant DESC Director/Divisional Leader whose contact details are available from their website.

When writing or emailing, please make sure to include;-

- A clear description outlining your complaint.
- Any supporting information you have.
- The name(s) of the member(s) of staff who has/have been dealing with the complaint.
- Your full postal address and telephone number.

#### **What action will be taken?**

The DESC Director/Divisional Leader will treat all complaints seriously and deal with them in a confidential manner.

You can expect to be treated with courtesy, respect and fairness at all times and we expect that you will also treat our staff dealing with your complaint with the same courtesy, respect and fairness. When complaints are received, we will ensure they are looked into openly and honestly. You can expect your complaint to be considered impartially.

The DESC Director/Divisional Leader may nominate another staff member to deal with your complaint, on their behalf.

#### Stage 2

If you believe the DESC Director/Divisional Leader did not handle your complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure, or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties, you can contact the Department after completion of **stage 1** of the complaints procedure and request an appeal.

The Department will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by the DESC Director/Divisional Leader. They will however consider whether

the DESC Director/Divisional Leader has adhered to the complaints procedure.  
You can contact the Department by telephone, email or in writing using the contact details below:

The Complaints Officer  
Department of Education, Sport and Culture  
Thie Slieau Whallian,  
Foxdale Road,  
St John's  
IM4 3AS  
email: [desccomplaints@gov.im](mailto:desccomplaints@gov.im)

Or ring us +44 1624 685808

You will receive a receipt of acknowledgement of your complaint within 5 working days, along with a copy of the Department's complaints procedure. Where possible, we will deal with your complaint within 28 working days, however if this is not possible, we will contact you to let you know the expected timeframe for a response.

The Complaints Officer will review whether the DESC Director/Divisional Leader has followed procedure and keep you informed of the outcome and if your complaint has been upheld.

## **Section 2 - Complaints about the DESC Director/Divisional Leader**

### **Stage 1**

If your complaint is against a DESC Director/Divisional Leader you can contact the Department, who will carry out a review into the complaint in accordance with the complaints procedure.

You can contact the Department by telephone, email or in writing using the Complaint Officer's contact details above.

When writing or emailing please make sure to include;-

- A clear description outlining your complaint against the DESC Director/Divisional Leader.
- Any supporting information you have.
- Your full postal address and telephone number.

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 working days and a review of your complaint will be undertaken by a senior officer as quickly as possible. You can expect a full written answer within 28 working days. If we are not able to send a full reply within these timescales we will inform you of the reason why and will keep you up to date on the progress.

### **Stage 2**

If you wish to appeal the Department's decision you will need to write to the Complaints Officer using the contact details above, explaining the reasons for your appeal.

The purpose of the appeal process is to identify whether the complaints procedure has been followed correctly by the Department.

Steps to be followed by the complainant:

- The appeal shall be submitted as soon as possible after receiving the stage 1 complaint decision and no later than 90 working days (three months) after receiving the decision from the Department.
- The appeal shall be submitted in writing by e-mail or letter.
- The appeal, besides the personal information (full name, address and other contact details) of the complainant, shall include the reasons why the complainant is not satisfied with the procedure carried out in stage 1.

The Department does reserve the right to refuse an appeal should there be sufficient evidence that the procedure has been followed correctly, and/or the complaint is vexatious, unreasonable, abusive or repetitive.

Once the Department has made its final response, neither the service nor Department will comment on the matter further, unless there are new aspects to consider.



### **Section 3 - Tynwald Ombudsman**

If you still remain dissatisfied and depending on the nature of your complaint, you may complain to the Tynwald Commissioner for Administration ("The Tynwald Ombudsman") within six months of receipt of the appeal outcome letter.

The Tynwald Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Tynwald Commissioner for Administration,  
C/o Office of the Clerk of Tynwald,  
Legislative Buildings,  
Finch Road,  
Douglas,  
Isle of Man,  
IM1 3PW  
Email: [ombudsman@parliament.org.im](mailto:ombudsman@parliament.org.im)  
Website: <https://www.tynwald.org.im/ombudsman>

## **Appendix 1 - Vexatious Complaints, Unreasonable and Abusive Behaviour Policy**

### Vexatious or Repetitive Complaints:

On occasions we receive complaints which can be deemed vexatious or repetitive. Some of these complaints can be costly to handle; or responding to them may be a disproportionate use of staff's time.

Deciding whether a complaint is vexatious requires us, in each case, to take into account the context and history of the complaint. We will consider whether the complaint is likely to cause unjustified distress, disruption or irritation. In particular we will consider the following issues:

- Could the complaint fairly be seen as obsessive?
- Is the complaint harassing or causing distress to staff?
- Does the complaint appear to be designed to cause disruption or annoyance?
- Does the complaint lack seriousness or value?

We will take into consideration the following factors (which are not an exhaustive list) when determining whether a complaint is vexatious:

- Where the complainant requests information which has already been provided.
- Where the nature and extent of the complainant's correspondence with us suggests an obsessive approach to disclosure.
- Where the tone adopted in correspondence by the complainant is confrontational and demonstrates that the purpose is to argue and not really to obtain information or resolution.
- Where the correspondence could reasonably be expected to have a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of our staff.
- Where the complaint, viewed as a whole, appears to be intended simply to re-open issues which have been disputed several times before, and is, in effect, the pursuit of a complaint by alternative means.
- Where it is not a 'one-off' complaint, but a case of the same complaints having been made repeatedly, or where on repetition, the particulars of the complaints have been varied making it difficult to know exactly what the complainant is seeking and making it less likely that the request can be satisfied.

No single one of the above factors would lead to a finding by itself that a complaint was vexatious. However, based on the strength of the various factors, taken together with the history and context of a complaint, a complaint may be deemed vexatious by the Department.

Complaints can sometimes become a vehicle for individuals to try to reopen previous issues. Although we recognise that people are not always satisfied with the responses they receive, the raising of complaints is not a panacea for problems that have not been resolved through other channels. Continued complaints after the underlying complaint has been addressed, go beyond the reasonable pursuit of resolution.

Our staff have the right to undertake their work free from abuse, threats and harassment, or vexatious and repetitive complaints. We expect our staff to be treated with courtesy and respect. The Department has a duty to protect the welfare and safety of staff and considers

threats or abuse toward staff as unacceptable. Staff are also expected to treat complaints with courtesy, respect and fairness.

We also consider that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can amount to abusive behaviour.

Where complaints are deemed vexatious, the complainant will be notified in writing that no further correspondence will be entered into on the matter in question.

Where unreasonable or abusive behaviour is determined, the complainant will be notified in writing that no further contact will be undertaken, and this will apply to all Department contacts. A decision to restrict contact will be reconsidered if the complainant subsequently demonstrates more reasonable behaviour.

If appropriate, incidents of harassment or aggression will be documented and if felt necessary will be reported to the Police.

## Appendix 2 - Department of Education Sport and Culture

### Complaint Form

<b>Details of Complainant:-</b>  Title  Name  Address  Post Code  Telephone number  E mail address
<b>Names and details of any persons involved</b>  .
<b>Is the complaint about the DESC Director/Divisional Leader? Y/N</b>  <i>If no, please confirm you have contacted the DESC Director/Divisional Leader and that they have carried out the stage 1 process, in accordance with the Complaints Procedure</i>  <i>If the complaint <u>is</u> about the DESC Director/Divisional Leader, please note your complaint will be handled by the Department's Complaints Officer.</i>
<b>Details of complaint</b> <b>(Please use separate sheet if necessary )</b>

<p><b>What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?</b></p>
<p><b>Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.</b></p>
<p><b>Signature of complainant:</b></p> <p><b>Date:</b></p> <p><b>Print name:</b></p>

**Glossary**

'Department' means the Department of Education, Sport and Culture (DESC) including schools, UCM, Villa Gaiety and MSR.

'EAS' means the Education, Advice and Support Division which is part of DESC.

'PSG' means the Policy, Strategy and Governance Division which is part of DESC.

'DESC Director/Divisional Leader' means the Senior Officer responsible for the management of an individual Division or service within DESC.

These include:

- Headteacher or Principal – Primary, Secondary School & UCM
- Head of Sport, Recreation & Youth – Sport, Recreation & Youth Service
- Head of Culture & Arts – Culture Division
- Director of Strategic Advice for Education– Education, Advice & Support Division
- Deputy Chief Officer – Policy, Strategy & Governance Division

## Version Control

The business area that owns this document is Policy, Strategy & Governance Division.

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V1.1	Policy, Strategy & Governance Division	February 2024	Final Version v1.1

## Review Date

This document was issued on 10/2023 and is due be reviewed in 10/2024