Aspirations Learning Institute Appeals and Complaints Policy

Version control	
September 2025	Wording reviewed, and template updated to reflect the rest of the trust policies.

Date of next review:	June 2028	**Owner:**	Aspirations Learning Institute Committee
Type of policy:	ALI	**Approving Body:**	EOB

1. Statement of Intent

Aspirations Learning Institute (ALI) operates as a training and development arm of Aspirations Academies Trust and its policies adhere to those of the trust but include points specific to adult education and training. The objective of this policy is to provide a prompt and fair response to any concern shown by a learner or employer.

Aspirations Learning Institute is committed to providing a high-level service to all learners, employers and partners. We encourage all involved in the course provision to give us feedback and to make constructive suggestions on how to improve our work and the quality of training. We seek to avoid the need for complaints by promoting good relationships and communications at all times, acting on feedback including from our quality assurance procedures. However, we recognise that occasionally a learner or an employer may have concerns. There may also be occasions when a learner or employer wishes to appeal against a decision made in relation to training.

2. Objectives

The aim of the policy and procedure is to set out the framework within which complaints and appeals against decisions from learners or employers will be dealt with to ensure that they are acted upon consistently, appropriately and in a timely manner.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Ensure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into the Academy's improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve concerns by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal complaint procedures will be followed.

3. Definitions and Scope

This policy and procedure relate to appeals against decisions and complaints from learners and employers to whom Aspirations Learning Institute provides its services. This procedure does not apply to safeguarding allegations, concerns relating to the prevent duty or whistleblowing complaints, each of which should be raised and dealt with under the relevant policy. Where Aspirations Learning Institute is working on behalf of other providers, their own complaints and appeals policies will normally supersede this policy. For example, some programmes only accept

appeals related to perceived procedural failure. See relevant programme guidance for further details.

3.1 The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint.

- A **concern** is defined as "an informal expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought".

- A **complaint** is defined as "a formal grievance that can help resolve issues earlier and hopefully reduce the need for escalation".

4. Complaint's procedure

4.1 Informal resolution

A learner who has a complaint about the training should initially raise it with their academy tutor. If the problem cannot be resolved, the learner should raise the matter with the programme leader or other senior member of Aspirations Learning Institute staff. Aspirations Learning Institute will find out more about the problem and to seek a solution.
If a complaint concerns a tutor, it should be raised with the programme leader or other senior member of Aspirations Learning Institute staff. If this does not lead to a satisfactory solution, the employer should contact the Director of Aspirations Learning Institute, who will investigate the matter.

Initial informal complaints should be emailed to kirstyrowling@aspitationsacademies.org marked confidential. This will be forwarded to the relevant member of the ALI team.

Timeframes: Responses to complaints raised will be wherever possible within **5 school days** to acknowledge the complaint and **15–20 school days** for a full response to manage complainant expectations and ensure accountability.

4.2 First formal stage

If the complaint is not resolved by discussion between the relevant parties the matter should be reported to the Director of Aspirations Learning Institute who will investigate, and try to resolve the issue.
If the involvement of the Director does not resolve the concern, and/or the Director is implicated in the complaint, the complainant should make a formal complaint, in writing, addressed to the chair of Aspirations Learning Institute Committee.

4.3 Second formal stage

The Aspirations Learning Institute Committee will:

- within 5 working days of receipt of the complaint in writing write to the complainant to acknowledge the formal complaint; and
- convene a meeting of the Complaints and Appeals Committee (at least 3 members). None of the Committee members will have had first-hand involvement in the needs assessment or training of the learner. The meeting will be convened as soon as reasonably practicable and, in any event, within 28 days of receiving the written complaint.

The Complaints and Appeals Committee will nominate a member of the committee to investigate the complaint (the Investigating Officer). The Investigating Officer will investigate the formal complaint impartially and will seek and consider the views of all relevant parties, together with supporting evidence. The Investigating Officer may speak with the complainant if any clarification is required. If the complaint involves the work of an Aspirations Learning Institute staff member, that person will be fully informed and their views and evidence will be sought as part of the investigation.
The Investigating Officer will send a report of the investigation to the Complaints and Appeals Committee as soon as reasonably practicable.
The Complaints and Appeals Committee will consider the investigation report, and reach a decision on how to resolve the complaint. It will confirm its decision to the complainant, in writing, within 5 working days of the decision.

5. Making an Appeal against a training decision

5.1 First Stage
A learner who wishes to make an appeal against a decision relating to training made by Aspirations Learning Institute should first discuss the grounds for the appeal with his or her tutor who should advise the learner on whether there are reasonable grounds for appeal as outlined in section 4.1 of this document. The learner should then contact the programme leader, in writing, explaining the grounds for appeal and providing supporting evidence. An employer may appeal on behalf of a learner, but should include evidence that the learner supports the appeal e.g. a signed statement. This first stage of the review will be carried out by the programme leader, who will review all available, relevant evidence. If the appeal is upheld, the learner and employer will be notified and appropriate action will be taken.
If the appeal is not upheld, the programme leader will refer the appeal to the Aspirations Learning Institute Committee.

5.2 Second Stage
The Aspirations Learning Institute Committee will convene a meeting of the Complaints and Appeals Committee (at least 3 members). None of the Committee members will have had any prior connection with the learner and his or her training. The meeting will be convened as soon as reasonably practicable and, in any event, within 28 days of the referral from the Director.
The Complaints and Appeals Committee will review the appeal, and all supporting evidence (seeking further clarification or evidence if required). The Complaints and Appeals Committee will make a decision on the appeal, based on all available relevant evidence, and notify the Director.
The Director will notify the employer and the learner of the decision within 5 working days and ensure that appropriate action is taken.

6. Referral to the OIA

If the learner or employer is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint or appeal (having exhausted Aspirations Learning Institute' procedure) they may refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for independent review. When Aspirations Learning Institute's internal procedure for dealing with complaints and appeals has been exhausted, Aspirations Learning Institute will issue (if requested) a Completion of Procedures Letter. The referral to the OIA must be made within 12 months of the final decision under Aspirations Learning Institute's procedures.

7. Persistent Complaints

7.1 Unreasonably persistent complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open an issue with the trainer or programme after the complaint's procedure has been fully exhausted and Aspirations Learning Institute has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the Chair (or other appropriate person in the case of a complaint about the Chair) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts those involved about the same issue, they can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which a response will not be sent is if:

- Aspirations Learning Institute has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, *and*
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of Aspirations Learning Institute's position and their options (if any), *and*
- The complainant is contacting the Aspirations Learning Institute repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time

7.2 Vexatious/Unreasonable complaints

The Department for Education (DfE) defines vexatious complaints as those that are obsessive, persistent, harassing, or designed to cause disruption rather than resolve a legitimate concern. It also advises schools / educational establishments to manage vexatious, persistent, or unreasonable complaints by focusing on the behavior rather than the person.

According to the DfE and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, a complaint may be considered vexatious if it involves:

- **Repetitive or Obsessive Conduct**: Persisting with an issue after all stages of the procedure have been exhausted.
- **Unreasonable Demands**: Insisting on unrealistic outcomes or pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- **Disruptive Intent**: Clearly designed to cause annoyance or consume a disproportionate amount of staff time.
- **Lack of Value**: Demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value.
- **AI-generated "barrages"**—such as persistent, unmeritorious complaints or those demanding unrealistic outcomes

The DfE advises that responding to a persistent complainant can stop if the answer **"yes"** to all of the following:

1. **Exhaustion of Steps**: The school has taken every reasonable step to address the concerns.
2. **Clear Communication**: The complainant has been given a clear statement of the school's position and their final options.

3. **Repetitive Contact**: The individual continues to contact the school repeatedly making substantially the same points.

Interactions will be documented, clearly communicating Aspirations Learning Institute's final position and if necessary, restrict communication, informing the complainant as to why the complaint will not be taken further.

If communications become excessive or harassing, a communication plan will be implemented that specifies approved methods of communication and limits contact as necessary.

Any aggressive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. Aspirations Learning Institute has the right under section 547 of the Education Act 1996 to bar individuals from their premises and report serious offences to the police.

Once the Aspirations Learning Institute has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or email.

The Aspirations Learning Institute will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that the Aspirations Learning Institute acts reasonably.

7.3 How to Raise a Concern or Complaint and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Academy recognises that complainants may use technology to assist in drafting correspondence. However, we strongly encourage complainants to use their own words to describe their concerns and the specific resolution they are seeking.

Complainants should be aware that:

Accuracy: AI-generated content often cites legislation or guidance incorrectly. The Academy will investigate complaints based on the facts of the case and current statutory requirements, regardless of any automated legal citations provided.

Clarity: Where a complaint is generated using AI and is excessively long, complex, or contains irrelevant information, the Academy may ask the complainant to provide a concise summary of their specific concerns before resolution proceeds.

Human-Led Resolution: As per our commitment to a non-adversarial process, we prioritise human-to-human dialogue. The use of AI-generated templates to create a 'legalistic' tone can hinder informal resolution. We reserve the right to hold a meeting (in person or via video link) to ensure we have a clear, human understanding of your concern before moving to a formal investigation.

8. Record-keeping

Aspirations Learning Institute will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, and the final outcome. The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will normally be viewed by those involved in investigating the complaint or members of the Complaint Review Panel. Representatives of the Aspirations Academies Learning Trust Board (e.g. senior members of the Trust's central

management team) may also have access to the records as part of the Trust's monitoring of the practice.

The records must also be made available to the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act where they request access to them. Relevant parts of the record or summary information may also be relevant for scrutiny or reporting in accordance with a freedom of information (FOI) request or the complainant making a subject access request under the General Data Protection Regulation.

Records of complaints will be kept securely, only for as long as necessary and in line with data protection law, the Aspirations Learning Institutes privacy notices and Trust policy as may be amended from time to time concerning management of records.

Complainants also have the right to request an independent panel if they believe there is likely to be bias in the proceedings. The decision to approve this request is made by the Chair of the Aspirations Learning Institute Trust Board in consultation with the Trust's Director of HR & Compliance. Consent will not be unreasonably withheld.

9. Contacts

Director of Aspirations Learning Institute - FAO Director of Education - confidential
kirstyrowling@aspirationsacademies.org

Managing Director – Steve Kenning
stevekenning@aspirationsacademies.org

Deputy Managing Director – Paula Kenning
paulakenning@aspirationsacademies.org

Chief Education Officer – Natasha Ullah
natashaullah@Aspirationsacademies.org

Director of HR & Compliance – Tracey Stratton
traceystratton@aspirationsacademies.org