

Complaints Policy

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Record of changes

Version	Date	Changes
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Policy Statement

At The Outdoors Group Ltd, we value the satisfaction of our service users and strive to provide the highest level of provision. We understand that, occasionally, concerns or complaints may arise, we are committed to treating all complaints seriously and resolving them promptly, fairly, and confidentially. We view complaints as valuable opportunities to learn and improve our services.

Our staff are required be familiar with the complaints procedure and know how to assist service users or members of the public in making a complaint. We encourage service users to familiarise themselves with this policy and at no point does this policy aim to obstruct or interfere with their statutory rights under the law.

Definitions and Scope

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to service users of The Outdoors Group Ltd or parents and carers of learners at The Outdoors School, or Transitional Learning Programme, or Forest School and Training. Any person, including members of the public, can make a complaint to The Outdoors Group Ltd about any provision, facilities, or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), this complaints policy and procedure will be followed.

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 possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint's procedure. The Outdoors Group Ltd takes concerns and complaints seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Exceptions

This policy covers all complaints about any provision, facilities, or services that The Outdoors Group Ltd provide, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures. This policy does not cover requests for a service, an explanation of The Outdoors Group Ltd policy or matters for which there is a right of appeal or legal remedy.

The following complaints are excluded from this policy:

Exception	Related Policies
<p>School Admissions</p> <p>Statutory Assessments of Special Educational Needs</p> <p>School re-organisation proposals?</p>	<p>Admissions Policy (The Outdoors School)</p> <p>Admissions Policy (Transitional Learning Programme)</p>
<p>Matters likely to require a Child Protection investigation</p>	<p>Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you are concerned about the safety of a child in Devon or want to speak to someone, or if you are a child worried about your own safety, you can contact the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completing an online request for support form • calling MASH on 0345 155 1071 • emailing mashsecure@devon.gov.uk and giving as much information as you can <p>If you need to contact Devon's Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), please consider all guidance first. If you believe the concern meets the remit of the LADO service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete the online notification form • or call 01392 384964 • or email ladosecure-mailbox@devon.gcsx.gov.uk for a notification form
<p>Exclusion of a Learner*</p>	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusions can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/school-behaviour-exclusions/exclusions</p> <p>*Complaints about the application of the Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy can be raised through the company complaints procedure.</p> <p>Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy (The Outdoors School)</p> <p>Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy (Transitional Learning Programme)</p>

Exception	Related Policies
Whistleblowing	<p>Our internal Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy for staff on the Whole Company SharePoint and Basecamp.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus</p> <p>Volunteers who have concerns should complain through this complaints policy and procedure. Volunteers may also be able to complain direct to the Local Authority or Department for Education depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
Staff Grievances	Our internal Grievance Policy for staff can be found within the Employee Handbook available on the Whole Company SharePoint and Basecamp.
Staff Conduct	<p>Complaints about staff conduct fall under our internal Disciplinary Policy, where appropriate. This can be found within the Employee Handbook available on the Whole Company SharePoint and Basecamp.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a member of staff because of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use The Outdoors Group Ltd premises or facilities.	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about their service and should be contacted directly.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example, the Police, Local Authority (LA) Safeguarding Teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their inspections.

If a complainant takes legal action against The Outdoors Group Ltd in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Anonymous Complaints

The Outdoors Group Ltd will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Company Directors/Company Secretary/Head of Business Area/Department as appropriate, can determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Complaints Received Outside of Term Time

The Outdoors Group Ltd will consider complaints made concerning term time provision received outside of term time to have been received on the first day of term, after the holiday period.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure The Outdoors Group Ltd wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur.
- An explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made.
- An undertaking to review The Outdoors Group Ltd policies and procedures considering the complaint.
- An apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wishes to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing by email or post, the Business Management Team will then confirm this to the relevant Head of Business Area/Department:

Email: complaints@outdoorsgroup.co.uk

Post: FAO [Head of Business Area]

The Outdoors Group Ltd
Western Lodge
Crediton
Devon
EX17 3NH

Complaints Procedure

Stage One - Informal

- When an individual has a concern or complaint, they should first attempt to resolve the issue informally by contacting the relevant Deputy of Business Area (Pillar) or Head of Department (Core Services), or a member of the staff team, so that it can be dealt with directly by the business area/department responsible for that service. Please refer to the [contact information](#) section of this policy. The complainant can do this in person, by telephone, email or using the [Complaints Form](#) on our website. It is preferable for all concerned that complaints be dealt with amicably and informally wherever possible.
- Complaints may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant if they have the appropriate consent to do so.
- The complainant must raise the complaint within three calendar months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Historic complaints cannot be fairly investigated due to the passage of time, or staff departures etc. The Outdoors Group Ltd will consider complaints made outside of this time frame where exceptional circumstances apply.
- The complainant should clearly explain the nature of their complaint, providing as much detail as possible including the date, time and location of the incident, people involved and any relevant supporting information.
- The staff member receiving the complaint should make their Deputy of Business Area/Head of Department, as appropriate, aware of the complaint, including the details of the complaint as soon as possible. They must also take phone and email contact details of the complainant to pass on to the Deputy of Business Area/Head of Department for them to respond.
- The Deputy of Business Area/Head of Department will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days of the date the complaint is received.
- Deputy of Business Area/Head of Department, as appropriate, should complete an [Internal Complaint Notification Form](#). This is received by the Business Management Team who keep a record of all company complaints and outcomes. This information is kept in line with our company Records Retention Schedule and Policy and UK GDPR.
- The Deputy of Business Area/Head of Department should promptly investigate the complaint, gather relevant information, and attempt to resolve the issue in an informal manner. This may involve discussions with the complainant, gathering additional evidence or seeking input from other relevant parties.

- Every effort will be made to investigate and respond to complaints as quickly as possible. The Outdoors Group Ltd aims to provide a full response within 20 working days but may consider an extension depending on the complexity of the issues raised. The complainant will be kept up to date on reasons for any delays and given new timescales for a response, as necessary.
- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response at Stage One and wishes to pursue the matter further, they must communicate this with the Deputy of Business Area/Head of Department within 20 working days of the response, so their complaint can be escalated formally to Stage Two.
- The Deputy of Business Area/Head of Department should provide a full update to the Business Management Team by completing an internal [Complaint Update and Outcome](#) Form detailing the response and outcome, including any requests to escalate to Stage Two for their records.

Stage Two - Formal

- Formal complaints must be made to the Head of Business Area (Pillar)/Alternative Head of Department (Core Services), please refer to the [contact information section](#) of this policy. Complaints can be made in person, in writing (preferably using the [Complaint Form](#)), or by telephone. Please include details of any response already received at Stage One and set out fully why you are not satisfied.
- In the event a complaint concerns the Head of Business Area (Pillar), complaints will be referred to an alternative Head of Business Area, please refer to the contact information section of this policy. This person will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage Two.
- The Head of Business Area/Department will record the date the complaint is escalated to Stage Two and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three working days of the date the complaint escalated to Stage Two.
- Within this acknowledgement, the Head of Business Area/Department will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Head of Business Area/Department can consider whether a face-to-face meeting with a written follow-up is the most appropriate way of doing this.
- The Head of Business Area/Department may delegate any investigation to another member of the senior leadership team, but not the decision to be taken.
- During the investigation, the Head of Business Area/Department (or delegated investigator) will:
 - If necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.

- Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.
- Every effort will be made to investigate and respond to complaints as quickly as possible. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Head of Business Area will provide a formal written response within 20 working days but may consider an extension depending on the complexity of the issues raised. The complainant will be kept up to date on reasons for any delays and given new timescales for a response, as necessary.
- The response will include any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions The Outdoors Group Ltd will take to resolve the complaint and prevent any recurrence.
- The response to a complaint at Stage Two will advise that if a complainant remains dissatisfied with the response, they may request a Company Director or the Company Secretary to consider their complaint. This must be communicated within 20 working days of the response at Stage Two, so the complaint can be escalated formally to Stage Three.
- The Head of Business Area/Department should provide a full update to the Business Management Team by completing an internal [Complaint Update and Outcome Form](#) detailing the response and outcome, including any requests to escalate to Stage Three for their records.

Stage Three - Formal

- If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the response to a complaint at Stage Two the complaint will be referred to the Company Directors. Or, if the complaint concerns a Company Director in connection with their executive responsibilities, the complaint will be referred to the Company Secretary. At this stage, the complainant will be asked to state specifically the full reasons for their continuing dissatisfaction in writing to:

Email: complaints@outdoorsgroup.co.uk

Post: FAO Company Director(s)/Secretary (as appropriate)

The Outdoors Group Ltd
Western Lodge
Crediton
Devon
EX17 3NH

- Where Stage Three of the complaint's procedure is reached, a panel of three people not involved in the matters detailed in the complaint will be convened; they will review the complaint and all associated documentation and will provide a decision and response.
- One member of this panel must be independent of The Outdoors Group Ltd. Where such a panel has been convened, the complainant may attend

a hearing to express their views and case for complaint. The complainant may be accompanied to this hearing should they wish.

- Complaints must have been considered by the first two stages of this policy and procedure before proceeding to panel. The panel will acknowledge the request in writing within three working days and inform the complainant of the right to submit any further documents or information relevant to the complaint. The panel will not consider new complaints. A deadline for submission of these documents will be five working days before the hearing.
- The Outdoors Group Ltd will submit the Stage One and Two responses (as appropriate) together with any written response from the Head of Business Area/Department as appropriate.
- The panel will set a timetable and will notify the complainant of this. The review hearing will be heard within 20 working days of receiving the request. The aim of the panel will be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between The Outdoors Group Ltd and the complainant where possible.
- The hearing will be held at a suitable meeting room at The Outdoors Group Ltd office(s). Any witnesses (other than the complainant and the Head of Business Area/Department) must only attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence. Good practice would be that at no point will the Head of Business Area/Department or the complainant be left with the panel without the other being present.
- Once the panel are satisfied that they have heard all the information they need to decide, the panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented.

The panel can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part.
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- Where appropriate, recommend changes to The Outdoors Group Ltd.'s systems or procedures to prevent similar difficulties in the future.

The members of the panel will normally respond to the complainant with a formal written response within **20 working days** but may consider an extension depending on the complexity of the issues raised. The complainant will be kept up to date on reasons for any delays and given new timescales for a response, as necessary.

- This response will include details of their rights to refer the matter to any relevant Ombudsman (or, in the case of Freedom of Information/Re-use of Public Sector Information, to the Information Commissioner).

All copies of the panel's findings and recommendations will be made available to the following people:

- The complainant
- The subject of the complaint (where appropriate)
- The Headteacher of The Outdoors School/Head of Business Area (where appropriate)
- The Company Directors (where appropriate)

Additional Information

Next Steps

If a complainant believes The Outdoors Group Ltd, has acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage Three. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by The Outdoors Group Ltd. They will consider whether The Outdoors Group Ltd has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education:

Online: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

Phone: 0370 0002288

Post: Department for Education

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Records Retention

All complaints of any nature that are made to The Outdoors Group Ltd will be kept securely, along with any notes and recommendations made and the level at which the complaint was dealt with. All complaints relating to The Outdoors School are kept on record and will be available for inspection at the school office by the Headteacher and the Company Directors. All complaints records will be kept securely for the time stipulated in line with our company Records Retention Schedule and Policy and UK GDPR.

Exceptions apply where they are requested by:

- The Secretary of State
- An inspection body such as Ofsted or the Independent School Inspectorate

Associated Legislation and Links

[Ofsted – Complaints Procedures](#)

The first step is always to raise any issues with the school, service, or provider by completing their full complaints procedure. Ofsted may not be able to accept your complaint if you have not done this already.

[Independent Schools Inspectorate \(ISI\) – Raising a Concern](#)

The ISI is not a complaints adjudicator and cannot investigate any concerns about a school. Instead, they look at how the school handles concerns. However, concerns may inform key lines of enquiry regarding a school's compliance with the standards at the time of its next inspection.

[National Schools and Colleges Contract](#)

For the Placement of Learners and Young People with High Needs in Day and Residential Schools and Colleges.

Associated The Outdoors Group Ltd Documentation

[Admissions Policy \(Transitional Learning Programme\)](#)

[Admissions Policy \(The Outdoors School\)](#)

[Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy \(Transitional Learning Programme\)](#)

[Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy \(The Outdoors School\)](#)

[Customer Charter Policy](#)

[Data Protection Policy](#)

[Employee Handbook](#) (accessed via Whole Company SharePoint and Basecamp)

[Payments Policy](#)

[Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy](#)

[Records Retention Schedule](#)

[External Complaint Form \(Website\)](#)

[Record a Complaint Form](#)

[Update a Complaint Form](#)

Complaint Data for the Preceding 3 years

These have been recorded against the quarter the initial complaint was received.

Business Area

The Outdoors School

Forest School & Training

Transitional Learning Programme

TOG / Core Services

Grievances

Total

2020/21				2021/22				2022/23				2023/24			
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
		2	2	2		1	5	5	1	1	1		2		
									5		1	2	6		
	1										2	1			
						1					1				
	1		1		1										
0	2	2	3	2	1	2	5	5	6	1	5	3	8	0	0

Contact Information

Note: When sending emails regarding complaints, please mark in the subject 'Complaint FAO: Head/Deputy of Business Area/Department,' as appropriate using the contact details below:

Business Area (Pillar)	Head of Business Area	Deputy of Business Area	Contact Details
Forest School & Training	Nick Murphy	Debbie Miller	Forest School Services: forestschool@outdoorsgroup.co.uk Training/CPD Courses: training@outdoorsgroup.co.uk Business Area Administrator: 07922 427608
The Outdoors School	Robyn Vincent	Jonathan Breeze	The Outdoors School: admin@theoutdoorsschool.co.uk Business Area Administrator(s): 07496 497023 or 07933 821934
Transitional Learning Programme	Tom Lowday	Jake Ward	Transitional Learning Programme: tlp@outdoorsgroup.co.uk Business Area Administrator: 07719 103200
People & Culture	Sameer Velayudhan	Arwen King or Peter Morgan	Human Resources, Marketing, Content: hr@outdoorsgroup.co.uk Business Area Administrator: 07922 427605

Business Area (Pillar)	Head of Business Area	Deputy of Business Area	Contact Details
Operations	Pete Morgan	Sameer Velayudhan or Arwen King	Estates, Health & Safety, Risk Assessments: fandp@outdoorsgroup.co.uk Business Area Administrator: 07718 162586
Business Management	Arwen King	Peter Morgan or Sameer Velayudhan	Finance (including Invoicing), Policies, Governance, Data Protection: business.management@outdoorsgroup.co.uk Business Area Administrator: 07933 822193

If you have any questions regarding this policy, please contact us using the details below:

By phone: 01392 715940

By email: complaints@outdoorsgroup.co.uk

By post: Complaints (Business Management)

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