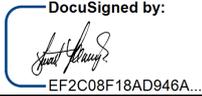


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Complaints Guidelines

	Position	Name	Signature	Date (DD/MM/YY)
Proposed by	Consultant	Stuart Leeming		02-Feb-22
Reviewed by	Executive Director - QFS Operations	Daniel Harrison		02-Feb-22
Approved by	PUE President	Abeer M. Al- Khalifa		02-Feb-22



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1. Record of Amendments

This is a record of changes made to this document, based on review.

Rev	Approval Date	Document ID Code	Description of Change
001	16/01/2022	PUE-QFS-GDL-001	Note: This was a merger of 2 separate documents 1. Complaints Policy Approved (23/03/2018) & 2. Complaints Procedure (30/08/2018)
002		PUE-QFS-GDL-002	Redraft to improve readability and address IA comments and MARQ recommendations

2. Scope and Authority

This **Complaints Guidelines** shall apply only to centres within Qatar Foundation that are part of the Division of Pre-University Education (PUE). The authority of the document is as described in the **Qatar Foundation Delegation of Authority Policy, Section 1.5 Corporate Governance**, and it is a **Second Level** document.

The term **Guidelines** is used to differentiate PUE-specific policy documents from Qatar Foundation **Policy** documents.

For school operation and accreditation purposes, the word **Guidelines** in the title of this document should be read as equivalent to the conventional use in education of the word **Policy**. As such, compliance is mandatory, not discretionary.

3. Objective

The Division of Pre-University Education and its centres and schools will take seriously and try to resolve as quickly as possible any complaint it receives. The **Complaints Guidelines** document explains how this will be done.

Complaints will be acted upon however they are brought to our attention.

Complaints which may have Safeguarding or Child Protection implications will be dealt with immediately under the provisions of the separate *PUE Child Protection Policy* and the laws of the State of Qatar which shall take precedence over the provisions of this document.

People who make a complaint will not experience any disadvantage from doing so.

Complaints will be dealt with in confidence.



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Individual centres may choose to incorporate the provisions of this document into their own, centre-specific documents, or they may adopt the document unchanged.

Where a centre chooses to produce their own document, **all** the provisions of this document **must** be incorporated into the centre-specific document, which must then be separately approved as defined in the Qatar Foundation Delegation of Authority Policy (unless the centre-specific document makes clear that this document is the definitive Authority).

The Guidelines should be used in conjunction with other PUE policies, procedures and guidelines; including Admissions, Promotion & Retention, and Child Protection.

Each QF centre will have its own handbooks or practices document that details how the guidelines are implemented.

4. Guidelines

Safeguarding and Child Protection

Any person receiving a complaint of any sort must first consider if a child may be at risk. If they have any suspicion at all, they must immediately consult the centre or school's Child Protection Officer. If they can't reach that person, they must speak to the PUE Child Protection Officer.

Where it is thought that a child may be at risk, the Child Protection Policy will be followed in place of this document.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction.

A complaint may be informal or formal.

A verbal (spoken) complaint may be considered to be informal if it can be resolved quickly and easily. Where there is any doubt, or the person complaining requests it, a verbal complaint will be treated as a formal complaint.

A written complaint will always be treated as a formal complaint.

A formal complaint will be investigated and resolved as described in this document.

How do I make a complaint?

If you don't know who you should talk to, you can complain to anyone who works for the centre or school concerned. Don't worry, they will make sure your complaint reaches the right person who can deal with it.

For informal complaints, you should speak to or write to the person you usually deal with. This might be your child's teacher, for example.

Formal complaints should be made by writing to the centre or school. If you know who the relevant Head of Section is, you can address your email or letter to them. If you don't know who they are, use the contact email address from the centre



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website. Your complaint will be forwarded to the right person who will then contact you.

How are complaints resolved?

We shall try to resolve every complaint in a positive way.

Wherever possible, we shall do our best to put right what may have gone wrong.

We shall review our systems and procedures following each formal complaint to try to avoid similar issues in the future.

Informal complaint – normally resolved informally by the person to whom the complaint was made. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, it becomes a formal complaint.

Formal complaint – resolved by formal process with a written conclusion.

When a formal complaint has been received, the centre Director must be told and a tracking record must be started.

There are three stages for considering a formal complaint. We try to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage:

- **Stage 1:** complaint referred to a member of the centre's Senior Leadership team or to the Centre Director.
- **Stage 2:** complaint referred to the relevant Director, Executive Director or person of equivalent status.
- **Stage 3:** complaint referred to an Appeal Panel.

The Appeal Panel provides a review process for lower decisions. The Appeal Panel will normally examine only:

- Whether the process used to resolve the complaint was as described in this document.
- Whether the response to the complaint is appropriate given the known facts.
- Whether any action taken in relation to the complaint is proportionate (does it seem to be reasonable).

The appeal will not be a rehearing of the complaint, but it may require a reconsideration by the centre concerned.

How quickly do we deal with complaints?

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible:



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- If we receive a formal complaint during term time, we shall acknowledge it within five working days. During holiday periods, we shall respond as soon as practicable.
- As soon as we acknowledge receiving a complaint, we shall begin to consider it. We try to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 10 working days of the acknowledgement. If the complaint is lodged during holiday periods it may take a little longer.
- If we are not able to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 10 working days, we shall explain why in writing and say when we expect to complete the process
- The Appeal Panel Hearing will be completed within a further 10 working days if the appeal is lodged during term-time, and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

How are complaints reported, recorded and managed?

Formal complaints are recorded in a Summary Record.

The Summary Record will note whether a complaint was resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or if it proceeded to an Appeal Panel hearing which is Stage 3.

The Summary Record will be held in electronic format and maintained by the centre or school responsible for managing the complaint.

The Summary Record will be accessible to PUE Senior Leaders and to the Director of MARQ.

The Summary Record should include the following information:

- Date when the complaint was received
- Date when the complaint was acknowledged
- Date when the complaint was closed
- Name and contact details of the person who made the complaint
- Name of the person against whom the complaint was made (if applicable)
- Name of pupil or student (if applicable)
- Name of parent (if applicable)
- Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Description of the issue
- Status / resolution.



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A comprehensive record of supporting documents, including contemporaneous notes, must be kept separately by the centre or school responsible for managing the complaint. The comprehensive record should include:

- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of telephone conversations)

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be treated as confidential.

The PUE Child Protection Policy and the laws of the State of Qatar, including data protection legislation, shall take precedence over the provisions of this document.

5. Measures & Procedures

Any part of the following procedure may be modified, within reason, to accommodate individual circumstances. Where that is necessary, we shall normally explain it in writing. A change to the procedure we follow, or a failure to tell the person who complained, will not normally make the response to a complaint invalid.

5.1. When an issue or concern first arises

To make a complaint you should first speak to a member of staff of the centre or school. You can do this either in person, over the telephone or in writing. You may then be invited to an informal meeting with the member of staff most appropriate for dealing with your concern. It does not matter who you speak to first, they will make sure your complaint is taken to the right person.

If your concern is about the safety of a child, it will be dealt with by following the PUE Child Protection Policy.

We try to resolve as many issues as possible with open dialogue and mutual understanding.

If your complaint is about a member of staff, you should first raise it with that member of staff, or with their Section Head or School Principal. You can do this either in person or in writing.

If your complaint is about the Section Head or Principal, you should raise your concern in writing with the relevant Director.

If your complaint is about the Director, you should raise your concern in writing with the relevant Executive Director.



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If your complaint is about anyone else, you should first raise it with a Section Head or School Principal. They will take it to the most appropriate person.

If your complaint is about an operational matter (the way we do things) **or a matter of policy** (the principles we work to), you should first raise it with a Section Head or School Principal. They will take it to the most appropriate person.

Once a concern has been raised you may be invited to an informal meeting with a member of staff, or the School Principal or Section Head.

You are welcome to bring a friend or spouse with you. It may be appropriate for a pupil to attend the meeting if their parent has raised a concern, depending on the nature of the issue.

At the end of the meeting, we shall make sure you understand what has been discussed and agreed. This will be recorded, and a summary will be shared with you in writing as well as any outcomes and the plan of action, if one has been agreed.

We shall do our best to make sure your concerns are dealt with appropriately and efficiently, but if you cannot come to an agreement or you are not satisfied with the outcome of your meeting, you can then make a formal complaint in writing to the school or centre Director.

5.2. Formal complaints

Formal complaints are dealt with in three Stages:

Stage 1

You can make a formal complaint in writing to a Section Head or Principal, or to the centre or school Director.

Your written complaint should provide enough detail to allow the centre or school to investigate and respond to the complaint.

The centre Director, or the person they delegate to, should acknowledge your complaint in writing within *two working days*. They will tell you about the procedure they will follow to investigate your complaint and say when they expect to give you a written response to the complaint. That will normally be within five working days.

The centre Director, or the person they delegate to, may ask you to come to a meeting. The meeting is to discuss with you what will happen as a result of your complaint, and to try to agree a resolution. A record of the meeting will be kept.

The centre Director, or the person they delegate to, will then write to you with their response to your complaint. They will tell you about any action that has been taken or will be taken in the future. If they have decided not to take any further action they will explain why, and how they have reached their decision. They will explain how you can take the matter further if you are not satisfied.



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Stage 2

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 of your complaint, you may proceed to Stage 2. To begin Stage 2, you must make your complaint in writing to either the centre Director (if they have not been involved up to now) or the relevant Executive Director. You can email your complaint to the contact address on the centre's website. It will be forwarded to the right person.

Your Stage 2 complaint should be received within *five working days* of the outcome at Stage 1. If your Stage 2 complaint is not received in writing within five working days, we shall assume that the decision at Stage 1 is has been accepted by you. The complaint will then be closed with a letter confirming this (unless there are exceptional circumstances to explain the delay).

Your Stage 2 complaint should explain your concern in detail and outline the steps that have led you to take your complaint to Stage 2.

If you know what actions you would like to be taken to resolve your complaint, you should say so at this stage.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, that employee will be given the opportunity to write a response. Their response must be given to the person considering your Stage 2 complaint within *five working days* of the complaint being received by them.

The person considering your Stage 2 complaint will usually write to you within *five working days*. They will tell you about any action that has been taken or will be taken in the future. If they have decided not to take any further action they will explain why. They will also explain how they have reached their decision and how you can take the matter further if you are not satisfied.

5.3. Appeals

Stage 3:

If you would like to lodge an appeal following the outcome of a formal complaint at stage 2, this will be considered by the *Appeals Panel*. You should write to the Office of the relevant Executive Director within *five working days* of the outcome at Stage 2 to ask for an appeal hearing. If no request for an appeal hearing is received within *five working days*, we shall assume that the decision at Stage 2 is has been accepted by you (unless there are exceptional circumstances to explain the delay).

If you don't know the contact details for the Office of the Executive Director, you can send your request by email to the contact address on the centre or school website. It will be forwarded to the right person.

If you do ask for an appeal hearing, we will acknowledge your request and make the necessary arrangements. The Appeal Hearing will normally take place within *ten working days* from the acknowledgement being sent to you.



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We shall do our best to agree a date and time for the Appeal Hearing that is acceptable to you.

If it is not possible to find a date and time that is acceptable to you for a hearing within a reasonable period, we may decide to hold the Appeal Hearing in your absence. In that case, you will be invited to make your case in writing to the Appeal Panel.

The secretary to the Executive Director (or the person they have delegated to) will act as Clerk to the Appeal. They will make sure that everyone has access to the same documentation, and they will set out a timetable for the collection and circulation of documents. Any documents that will be considered during the Appeal Hearing must be received at least *5 working days* before the date of the Hearing.

The appeals panel is not required to hear spoken evidence or presentations, but the Panel Chair may choose to do so. The Appeals Panel will not normally accept recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded. Similarly, anonymous written information and second-hand accounts will not normally be considered.

The appeal will not be a rehearing of the complaint, but it may require a reconsideration by the centre concerned. The appeal will examine the process used at Stage 1 and Stage 2. It will have access to all information as needed to comment on the appropriateness or proportionality of the responses.

You may be accompanied to the appeals panel hearing and should notify the Clerk to the Appeal if you attend to bring anyone. It is not appropriate or acceptable to bring a legal representative to an Appeal Hearing.

5.4. The Appeal Panel

There will normally be a minimum of three and maximum of five people on the Panel.

People who already know about your complaint or who have had any involvement with it so far are not allowed to be part of the Appeal Panel.

The Appeal Panel may include an independent advisor or expert.

The Chair of the Panel will be the relevant Executive Director or a person of similar status.

The Appeal Panel will not review any new complaints or consider information that is not directly related to your initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

5.5. Appeals procedure

The Chair of the Appeals Panel will decide the procedure to be followed to make sure it is able to deal with the issues you have raised in your complaint. The procedure will be explained to you before the Hearing. The procedure for an appeal is typically as follows:

1. *The person making the complaint and the representatives of the Centre or School will enter the hearing together.*



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2. *The chair will introduce the panel members and outline the process.*
3. *The person making the complaint will explain the complaint.*
4. *The representative of the centre or school will explain the centre or school's actions.*
5. *The representatives of the centre or school, and members of the panel, may question the person making the complaint.*
6. *The person making the complaint and members of the panel may question the representative of the centre or school.*
7. *The person making the complaint will sum up their complaint.*
8. *The representative of the centre or school will sum up the centre or school's actions.*
9. *The chair will explain that both parties will hear from the panel within seven working days.*
10. *Both parties will leave together while the panel decides.*
11. *The clerk will stay to assist the panel with its decision making and to record the process.*

The Clerk to the Appeal will make sure that sufficient notes are taken to record accurately the points considered, and any decisions taken or actions agreed.

Electronic recordings of the hearing will not normally be permitted. Secretly recording the hearing may have serious consequences.

The Chair of the Appeal Panel will tell you the Panel's decision in writing within seven working days of the appeal hearing. The letter will include an explanation of how the decision was reached. The letter may make recommendations to the centre or school, and any recommendations will be copied to the Director of MARQ.

The Appeals Panel may:

- uphold all or part of the complaint
- dismiss all or part of the complaint
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- evaluate all the evidence available and recommend changes to the centre or school's systems or procedures to try to avoid similar issues arising in the future.
- Recommend other actions as deemed appropriate by the Chair

The Panel's decision is final.



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5.6. Complaints Monitoring

Schools and centres are required to record all formal complaints they receive and the stage at which they are resolved. This high-level information will be recorded centrally and be accessible to authorised centre or school personnel. The Director of MARQ will monitor the central recording of complaint data and, on an annual basis, sample in more detail a selection of complaints. Feedback, including recommendations, will be provided to centres or schools.

6. References

- The Independent Schools' Bursars Association *Complaints Policy* (Sept 2012)
- Veale Wasbrough Vizards *Parental Complaints Policy and Procedures* (Sept 2013).
- See also, Optimus Education.

