



Resolving Issues at Work Policy and Procedure

(Covers Grievance, Harassment and Bullying)

The Star Multi Academy Trust

| Reviewed by | Date | Changes | Adopted on |
|-------------|---------------|--|-----------------------------|
| EPM | February 2022 | Addition of guidance letters, proforma templates and model letters | 5 th April 2022 |
| NYES HR | January 2025 | Inclusion of reference to Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy, insertion of definitions of grievance, bullying and harassment, clarification of reporting lines for central team grievances, templates removed | 25 th March 2025 |

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1. Scope

- 1.1 This Policy applies to all employees (all teaching and support staff) of the STAR Multi Academy Trust and is compliant with ACAS Code of Practice and Statutory Legislation.
- 1.2 The Trust believes that all employees should be treated fairly and have the right to work in a safe environment without the fear of discrimination, harassment or abuse. The Trust has a range of policies and procedures aimed at promoting good employment practices but recognises that occasionally problems can arise. This policy provides the means for employees to raise genuine complaints and concerns and have them dealt with fairly, objectively and effectively, without fear of recrimination.
- 1.3 Grievances are concerns, problems or complaints that an employee, or group of employees, has about their work, working conditions and practices, treatment at work or relationships with colleagues.
- 1.4 Employees may not raise a grievance if the matter is already covered by or connected to another policy or procedure, or the appeal mechanism related to these, unless that procedure has not been correctly applied.
- 1.5 Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual or involve groups of people. There are a broad range of behaviours that fall under these categories and, in all instances and in whatever form it takes, the actions are unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual. The Trust is responsible for trying to prevent such behaviour within the workplace and will seek to challenge and address all instances of this type of conduct.
- 1.6 Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct affecting people's dignity in the workplace. It may be related to any protected or personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.
- 1.7 Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.
- 1.8 Conduct issues arising from any investigations should be resolved under the Trust's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 1.9 Where reference is made to Manager within this policy, this could mean CEO, Executive Headteacher, Head Teacher, Senior Leader, line manager, Head of Department/ Faculty or Business Manager. Trustees or Local Governors may be involved where issues relate to the Executive Headteacher / Headteacher /senior leaders or in Resolving Issues at Work hearings and appeals**

1.10 When reading and applying this Policy, Managers and employees should refer to the accompanying Guidance. Relevant sections of the Guidance are cross-referenced within Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 (Appendix 1)

2. Policy Statement *(Please refer to Appendix 1: Guidance – Section 2)*

2.1 This Trust is committed to fostering a workplace where employees feel able to raise issues of concern, and for such concerns to be resolved as soon as possible, with the least formality possible. The objective of this policy is to settle all issues in the shortest time and appropriate levels of confidentiality, as close to the point of origin as possible.

2.3 Examples of issues that may be dealt with through this policy include:

- Relationships at work (with colleagues/manager)
- Equalities e.g. discrimination
- Harassment and bullying
- Health and Safety
- Terms and conditions of employment

2.4 If an employee experiences issues as a result of proceedings under another policy, it should be dealt with under that procedure and not Resolving Issues at Work. However, if it is appropriate to raise issues under this procedure, this will not halt the other process.

2.5 An employee who raises a grievance that is found to be vexatious may face disciplinary action. A vexatious grievance is one which is fabricated for personal gain and/or the purpose is to harm the subject of the complaint or cause undue delay to a process.

2.6 Behaviour may not be intended to harass or bully, but it may be perceived or felt to do so by the recipient. In short, it is the recipient who decides what potentially constitutes harassment / bullying in terms of what is unacceptable / offensive to them personally. However, consideration should be given to what would be found reasonable by most people.

2.7 Where a complainant raises an allegation of inappropriate conduct against another school employee, an initial assessment of the facts and complaint should be undertaken to determine whether it is appropriate to try and address the matter through resolving issues at work, or whether it is more appropriate to investigate the allegation/s as a potential disciplinary matter. In reaching this determination, the school will take into account;

- any wishes expressed by the complainant
- the severity of what is alleged
- the potential implications if such allegation/s are proven against the individual
- their right of reply in the context of allegations having a potential impact in respect of their conduct
- the Trust's commitment to taking all reasonable steps to prevent employees from harassment in the workplace.

2.8 Where complaints of sexual harassment are deemed appropriate to be addressed through the resolving issues at work policy, leaders are advised to consider carefully how best to support those involved during the process. For such cases, leaders should read the sexual harassment policy in conjunction with this policy.

3. Procedure - Informal Stage *(Please refer to Appendix 1: Guidance – Section 3)*

3.1 Where an issue arises, the employee should firstly speak to the person concerned.

3.2 Where this does not work, or the employee feels unable to do this, they should speak to their line manager who will support them in trying to resolve the situation informally. If the issue is related to their line manager, then the employee should speak to their manager's manager or an alternative manager of appropriate seniority. (Please refer to table 1 in appendix 1 for information about reporting arrangements for issues relating to senior leaders, Trustees and Local Governors).

3.3 Normally, employees will not be accompanied when trying to resolve an issue informally. Many issues can be raised and settled quickly between the employee, related staff and their line manager(s). However, if an employee wishes to be accompanied by a work colleague or recognised Trade Union representative at meetings under the informal stage, then this should be supported where possible.

3.4 Managers do not need to keep minutes of informal meetings but a note of the outcome and any agreed actions should be recorded and retained on the relevant employees' personal file(s).

3.5 Where an employee does not feel that an issue has been satisfactorily resolved informally, then they may choose to raise the issue formally under this procedure.

4. Procedure – Formal Stage *(Please refer to Appendix 1: Guidance – Section 4)*

4.1 An employee who wishes to raise concerns formally needs to put their issue/s in writing to their line manager, or where this is not appropriate (for example if they are related to the subject of the complaint) to an alternative manager of appropriate seniority. (Please refer to table 1, Appendix 1 for information about reporting arrangements for issues relating to senior managers, Trustees and Local Governors).

4.2 The written complaint should include the following information:

- what the issue is;
- the parties involved;
- what has been done to try and resolve the issue informally;
- why this has not worked;
- what they see as a solution to the situation.

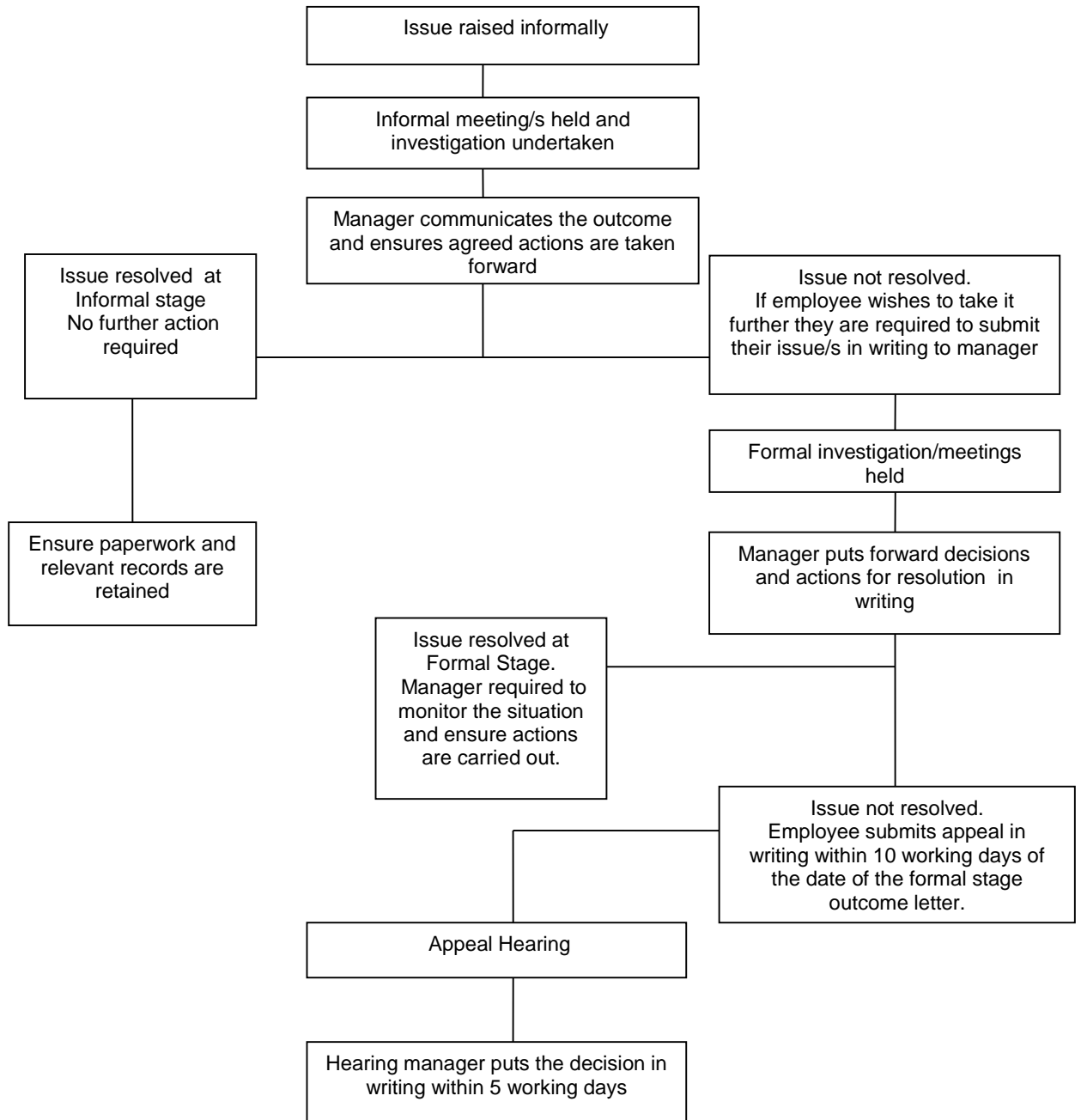
- 4.3. The designated manager will arrange to meet with the individual concerned without unreasonable delay. At the meeting the employee will explain their issue(s) and how they think the issue should be resolved. The employee has the right to be accompanied, by a work colleague or recognised Trade Union representative at this meeting.
- 4.4 The manager will then fully investigate the issue(s) as soon as possible. This may involve a number of meetings with different people (including witnesses), to establish the facts and involve gathering together relevant documents.
- 4.5 If an employee becomes ill at a time when required to attend a Resolving Issues at Work meeting, in normal circumstances, the meeting will be postponed. An explanation and supporting medical evidence may be sought.
- 4.6 Where it is apparent that the sickness absence will be for a prolonged period, the employee should be referred to the Academy Trust's health and well-being partner services to enquire if the employee is fit or when they are likely to be fit to take part in the Resolving Issues at Work process.
- 4.7 In the event of longer term sickness absence, where an employee is not fit to take part in the Resolving Issues at Work process, aspects of the process that can be completed in the employee's absence (such as interviewing other members of staff and gathering relevant documents) can continue.
- 4.8 Having fully investigated and considered the issues raised, the manager will report to the employee in writing the findings and outcome of their investigation, and where appropriate, actions arising out of the investigation.
- 4.9 On occasion, conduct issues may arise from investigations carried out under the Resolving Issues at Work policy. These issues should be addressed via the Academy Trust's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, with the allegation(s) made clear to the appropriate employee(s) and a separate investigation carried out under the Disciplinary policy. It may be appropriate to use witness statements gathered during the Resolving Issues at Work procedure on these occasions, and witnesses will need to provide consent for this, prior to their use. Alternatively, witnesses may be re-interviewed where appropriate.
- 4.10 If the issue is resolved at this formal stage, the manager who has led the investigation will monitor the situation to ensure that the agreed actions are carried out.
- 4.11 If the employee who raised the issue does not accept the decision they will be given the right of appeal to an independent panel.

5. Procedure - Formal Appeal Stage (*Please refer to Appendix 1: Guidance – Section 5*)

- 5.1 An employee must submit a letter of appeal to the manager who investigated the issue, within 10 working days of the date of the letter informing them of the decision at the formal stage.
- 5.2 The employee must be clear about the grounds of appeal, which may relate the facts of the case and/or procedural points and/or due to new evidence emerging.

- 5.3 Appeals will be heard at the earliest opportunity and will be heard by an Appeals Panel made up from at least two non-staff Governors/Trustees. Decisions are delegated to the local governors/trustees.
- 5.4 The Appeal Hearing will be convened in line with the Academy Trust's Hearing and Appeals Procedure.
- 5.5 The outcome of the Appeal Hearing must be confirmed in writing, normally within 5 working days of the date of the hearing. Appeal is the final stage and this concludes the internal process.
- 6. Addressing issues once employment has ended** (*Please refer to Appendix 1: Guidance Section 4.2 – Case Law*)
- 6.1 There is no legal requirement for an employer to deal with grievances which are first raised after the employment has ended. However, depending on the nature of the issue(s) raised, it may be felt appropriate to investigate them and make a response. It is therefore important to seek advice from HR when an issue / complaint is received in writing after the employment has ended. In the majority of cases, issues raised after employees have left will be handled in writing by both parties.
- 6.2 Complaints that are raised in resignation letters/emails or through exit interview processes should be followed up as soon as possible, as these have been raised prior to the employment ending. As with other complaints, the process would normally begin at the informal stage.

7. Flowdiagram



Appendix 1: Guidance Documents

Section 1: Introduction

Each section of the guidance corresponds with the relevant section of the Resolving Issues at Work Policy and Procedure and is cross-referenced accordingly.

This guidance has been produced both for managers and employees.

Managers are strongly advised to take advice from the Trust HR Provider with regards the application of the Resolving Issues at Work Policy and Procedure and Guidance at all stages.

Section 2: Policy Statement Guidance

The focus of this policy is to encourage employees to resolve issues at work as close to the source of the problem as possible. It aims to encourage people to talk about their issues openly with the person/s concerned, where possible, in order to seek an early solution and a way forward.

It should be noted that where this process is entered into the eventual outcome may not always be what the individual/s expected but will always aim to seek a viable solution to the matter. However, there will be a requirement for all parties concerned to co-operate. It is the managers responsibility to ensure that decisions are implemented and actions take place accordingly and it is the employees responsibility to fully cooperate with this.

It is essential that all parties involved in the procedure:

- Co-operate and engage in the process
- Take responsibility for and be committed to seeking a solution to the situation
- Deal with matters in a timely manner
- Do not use this procedure for allegations of a vexatious nature

Examples of issues that may be dealt with through the procedure include:

- Relationships at work (with colleagues/manager)
- Equalities e.g. discrimination
- Harassment and bullying *
- Health and Safety (please also refer to the Health and Safety Policy for issues relating to health and safety)
- Terms and conditions of employment (i.e. how they have been applied or interpreted)

Section 3: Procedure – Informal Stage

The majority of work place issues will be dealt with informally through normal day-to-day supervision and it is important to recognise that managers exercise judgement as part of their daily responsibilities. Managers should support employees in trying to

resolve work place issues informally by facilitating discussions between the relevant parties.

Managers do not need to keep minutes of informal meetings but a note of the outcome should be recorded and retained on file.

Section 4: Procedure – Formal Stage

Where an employee does not feel that an issue has been resolved satisfactorily, informally, then they may choose to raise the issue formally under this procedure.

How to raise concerns formally under the Resolving Issues at Work Policy and Procedure

An employee who wishes to raise concerns formally needs to put their issue/s in writing to their line manager, or where this is not appropriate (for example if they are related to the subject of the complaint) to an alternative manager of appropriate seniority.

Table 1: Arrangements for issues involving senior managers, members of the Governing Body, CEO and Trustees

| Nature of Issue | Action required |
|--|---|
| Where an employee(s) has an issue with the CEO | Member of staff to raise the issue with the Chair of Trustees. |
| Where an employee(s) has an issue about a member of the central team | Member of staff to raise the issue with their line manager. If their line manager is the subject of the issue it should be raised to the CEO. |
| Where an employee(s) has an issue against the Executive Head Teacher / Headteacher | Member of staff to raise the issue with the Chair of Governors. Chair of Governors to ensure that the Resolving Issues at Work procedure is followed, as appropriate. Appeal would be to a panel of Governors. |
| Where an employee(s) (including an Executive Head Teacher / Headteacher) has an issue against a Governor or the Governing Body | Member of staff (or Executive Head Teacher / Headteacher) to raise the issue with the Chair of Governors. Chair of Governors to ensure that the Resolving Issues at Work procedure is followed. If the issue progresses to the formal stage then the Chair of Governors will make a formal written report to the appropriate Committee of Governors and will inform the employee in writing of the outcome. LA advice should initially be sought. Appeal would be to a separate panel of Governors. |
| Where an employee(s) (including an Executive Head Teacher / Headteacher) has an issue against the Chair of Governors | Member of staff to raise the issue with the Vice Chair of Governors. Vice Chair of Governors to ensure that the Resolving Issues at Work procedure |

| | |
|--|---|
| | is followed. If the issue progresses to the formal stage then the Vice Chair of Governors will make a formal written report to the appropriate Committee of Governors and will inform the employee in writing of the outcome. LA advice should initially be sought. Appeal would be to a separate panel of Governors. |
|--|---|

The written complaint should include the following information:

- what the issue is;
- the parties involved;
- what has been done to try and resolve the issue informally;
- why this has not worked;
- what they see as a solution to the situation.

Employees may choose to complete a proforma which accompanies this guidance as a prompt for outlining their issues, this can be found under 'Template 1: Employee proforma to outline issues and help discussions'. Please note that employees do not need to submit this proforma in order to raise their grievance/complaint. Please refer to case law information below on handling disputes, which specifies that employers must take care in noting the receipt of a grievance/complaint as they may be lodged through a variety of methods.

Meeting with employee and investigation of issue

On receipt of a complaint, a manager must organise to meet with the employee as soon as possible and undertake an investigation, in order to provide a formal written response.

Case law has resulted in the need for employers to be aware that they must respond, in writing, to all complaints (including email) even when the person has not stated that it is a grievance/complaint.

Case Law – Point to Note

Case Law on handling disputes (grievance/complaints) in the workplace suggests that employers need to take particular care in establishing whether or not a complaint has been lodged and therefore requires investigation under the Resolving Issues at Work Policy and Procedure. Employers will need to analyse any written communication, which may amount to a complaint, very carefully.

For example – A letter can amount to a complaint/grievance where:

- The letter of complaint is sent to someone other than the person stated in the Resolving Issues at Work procedure (RIAW)

- The complaint is only briefly referred to and in no detail, as long as in the context of the case, the employer can be expected to understand that the complaint is being raised.
- The letter fulfils more than one purpose/function
- The complaint is in a letter of resignation even if there is only a passing reference to it
- The letter does not mention or suggest the work grievance/complaint, or refer to the RIAW procedure
- The complaint is contained in a solicitors letter before action or in a without prejudice correspondence
- Subject to particular facts, the complaint is contained in a letter which states that a complaint / grievance will be formulated at some point in the future.

At the meeting the employee will explain their issue(s) and how they think the issue should be resolved. Managers should record the discussions that take place within the meeting. (Please see 'Template 2: Record of Resolving Issues at Work Meeting')

Advice/Support

Managers should remember that all parties involved in the Resolving Issues at Work process may find the situation difficult and emotionally challenging. It may be helpful to share details of Health Assured (telephone: 0800 0305182) with all parties at the start of the process and to keep all parties informed of progress in a timely manner, throughout the process.

Sickness absence during the RIAW procedure

Where an absence has been prolonged and the RIAW procedure is a significant factor in that absence (preventing an employee from returning to work), the Attendance Management Procedure will be followed according to normal procedure.

Any formal meeting to be held with the employee under the Resolving Issues at Work procedure will normally be postponed until either they deem themselves or Occupational Health deems them (whichever is sooner) fit to take part in that process, following which the procedure should continue.

However, at the point that, under the Attendance Management Policy, a case proceeds to an Attendance Management panel, it may be appropriate to consider the RIAW issues as part of the formal Attendance Management hearing.

Outcome of Investigation

Having fully investigated and considered the issues raised, the manager will report to the employee in writing the findings and outcome of their investigation, and where appropriate, actions arising out of the investigation. (Please see 'Template 3: Outcome of Resolving Issues at Work Investigation')

The manager may decide to present this information at a further meeting prior to sending it in writing. The findings may be accompanied by a report to fully explain the process and outcome. A copy of this will be saved on the employee's personal file.

Independent Facilitation

One outcome of the investigation may be independent facilitation between two or more parties from an independent third party to help rebuild the working relationship. Facilitation (also known as mediation) is optional and involves a neutral independent, third party who is completely impartial, pulling the parties together to move an issue to a satisfactory conclusion for all. The process aims to resolve situations where other workplace interventions have failed.

It is not a requirement of this policy that facilitation will be used in every situation, nor is it a required stage in the procedure. Normally, the individuals concerned would be expected to resolve the issue between themselves informally, or with the help of the manager through the Resolving Issues at Work Procedure.

How to book facilitators

Trained facilitators can be booked via Health Assured 0800 030 5182.

Referral and booking must be made by the manager, as the academy of the employee that has raised the issue, will be required to pay for this service.

Whilst facilitation does incur a cost; managers are advised to balance this against the direct and indirect costs of a protracted employee relations issue in their service. Often facilitation is a cost effective option, delivering satisfactory outcomes for all parties involved.

The principles of facilitation

The principles of facilitation are as follows:

- Collaborative problem solving to reach a solution acceptable to all.
- Focus on the future, emphasise a positive working relationship in the future, rather than apportioning blame for the past.
- A belief that communication is often the key to workplace disputes.
- The parties must be in agreement to use this method of conflict resolution

The process of facilitation

Facilitation is both confidential and privileged, which means that anything said during facilitation, cannot be relied upon in subsequent legal proceedings. Representation is not appropriate during facilitation, as it is up to the parties concerned, to have a full, frank and honest discussion without the distraction of other parties being present. There is no written record of the meeting. The facilitator will however:

- Write to the parties concerned, setting out what they have agreed to, and will require them to sign this and return it to the facilitator.
- A copy of this will then be sent to the manager of the employee(s) who made the original complaint.
- The manager is then responsible for bringing both parties together again, to discuss the agreed outcome and how this will be put in place.
- The facilitators note should be kept on the employee's e-file, in line with Mediation UK practice.
- Where one of the parties refuses to continue to participate in facilitation, the manager will then put forward their final decisions and actions for resolution.

The role of the facilitator is to help people in dispute, to find a mutually acceptable solution through developing options for resolution. Whilst the facilitator owns and

manages the process, the solution and agreement rests with the parties concerned who with the help of the facilitator, will come up with their own solutions to move forward.

Exceptions to confidentiality within the facilitation process

- Where there is a concern that there is a likelihood of serious physical or emotional harm to the individual or others
- Where there may be a breach in the law
- Where a court made a legal order (subpoena)
- A release form signed by the individual has been obtained specifying to whom the information is to be released.

Representation

Employees have the right to be accompanied at the formal stage of the RIAW procedure by a work colleague or recognised Trade Union representative. However, if an employee requests to be accompanied by a work colleague or recognised Trade Union representative at the informal stage, then this should be permitted.

Section 5: Procedure – Formal Appeal Stage

An employee must submit a letter of appeal to the manager who investigated the issue, within 10 working days of the date of the letter informing them of the decision at the formal stage.

The appeal letter should summarise what has happened to date, state why they are not able to accept the decision, and state what they feel the solution to the issue should be and why.

Appeals will be heard at the earliest opportunity and will be heard by an Appeals Panel. An Appeals Panel will normally comprise of 3 members of the Governing Body who have not had any prior involvement or knowledge of the issue and investigation. Staff Governors should not form part of an Appeals Panel for Resolving Issues at Work issues.

Employees must be invited to the Appeal Hearing in writing. (Please see 'Template 4: Invitation to Appeal Hearing')

All parties must submit full documentary evidence to be presented at the hearing together with details of any witnesses they wish to call (if applicable) as soon as possible and no later than 5 working days prior to the Hearing. Documentation to be submitted should include:

- a copied set of all the previous relevant letters /pro-formas/information
- any action plan agreed
- the employee's written case for appeal

The outcome of the Appeal Hearing must be confirmed in writing, normally within 5 working days of the date of the hearing. (Please see 'Template 5: Delay with outcome of Appeal Hearing, Template 6: Outcome of Appeal Hearing').

Template 1: Employee pro-forma to outline issues and help discussions

Name
Contact Number
Job Title
Department

Please outline your issue/s with regard to:
1 What is causing you concern?
2 Who has been involved in this?
3 What action have you taken to resolve it?
4 Why has this not worked?

Please outline how you think this situation can be resolved.

You may attach additional information.

Employee signature
Date

Please send completed form to your line manager or other appropriate senior manager

Template 2: Record of Resolving Issues at Work meeting

Employee's name

Date of meeting

Venue

Name of Manager

| |
|----------------------------------|
| Main points of discussion |
| Decisions |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Name of Manager | Name of Employee |
| Signature of Manager | Signature of Employee |
| Date | Date |