

Patron | HRH Duke of York, KG
Chairman | Trevor Rowell MA(Oxon) BPhil PGCE FIoD

COBIS Complaints Policy

Introduction

COBIS exists to represent the collective interests of its member schools, to offer them opportunities for professional information, training and improvement, and to promote the quality and reputation of the best in British international education worldwide. COBIS is committed to providing high quality services and support.

We believe we achieve this most of the time, but if we are not getting it right, we invite you to please let us know.

In order to ensure our services and support remain at a high and improving standard, we have a procedure through which you can let us know of for any reason you are not satisfied with your dealings with COBIS.

Definitions and Scope

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

COBIS will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible.

A **'complaint'** is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action".

COBIS intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling complaints at every stage.

When responding to complaints, COBIS aims to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

COBIS will work to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed. To support this, COBIS will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the COBIS website.

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COBIS is an affiliate member of the Independent Schools Council (UK)
COBIS Ltd. is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales. Company No: 7348782 Registered VAT No: 133706039

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Principles and Timescales for Investigation

When investigating a complaint, COBIS will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

COBIS intends to address complaints as quickly as possible. COBIS will acknowledge Informal (Stage 1) complaints within three working days and investigate and provide a response within three working weeks.

If the complaint is escalated to a Formal (Stage 2-4) complaint, there will be an initial response within three working days. COBIS expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than three months afterwards. COBIS will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

While COBIS always seeks positive and constructive resolution to any complaint, all correspondence from COBIS to a complainant will remain confidential.

Complaints relating to COBIS Member Schools

If your complaint is not about COBIS, but relates to a member school, please refer to the COBIS School Complaints Policy which can be found [here](#).

Complaints relating to the COBIS CEO or COBIS Board Members

If your complaint is about the CEO, please direct your complaint to the Vice-Chairman. Where a complaint is against the COBIS Chairman or any member of the COBIS Board (not including the COBIS Vice-Chairman), it should be made in writing to the COBIS Vice-Chairman. If the complaint is against the COBIS Vice-Chairman, it should be made in writing to the COBIS Chairman.

Stages of the Complaint Process

COBIS has set out four stages of the Complaint Process.

Stage 1: Informal

COBIS will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant COBIS representative, either in person or by letter, telephone or e-mail. In the first instance, complaints should be sent to pa@cobis.org.uk or posted to the COBIS Head Office for the attention of the COBIS Complaints Team.

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COBIS will acknowledge informal complaints within three working days and investigate and provide a response within three working weeks.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a Formal complaint (Stage 2).

Stage 2: Formal

If you would like to make a Formal complaint, or if you feel your informal complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily, please inform in writing, the COBIS CEO, or the relevant COBIS representative.

This e-mail or letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and individuals involved in any events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The COBIS CEO (or relevant COBIS representative) will arrange a face-to-face or skype meeting to clarify concerns and seek a resolution. The complainant may be accompanied to this meeting, but should, in such instance, inform COBIS in advance of the identity of their companion.

In certain circumstances, COBIS may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, COBIS will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

The COBIS CEO, or other person appointed by COBIS CEO for this purpose, will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within three working weeks.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure (Stage 3), they should inform the COBIS Vice-Chairman in writing within ten days of receipt of the written conclusion.

Stage 3: Inform the COBIS Vice-Chairman in writing

This letter should set out the details of the complaint including evidence as set out above. The complainant should also specify what they feel would resolve the complaint, and how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently.

The Vice Chairman will acknowledge receipt of the letter within three working days. The written conclusion of the investigation will be sent to the complainant within ten days of the receipt of the above-mentioned letter by the Vice Chairman.

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage (Stage 4) of the procedure, they should inform the COBIS Vice-Chairman in writing within ten days of receipt of the written conclusion.

Stage 4: Submit the Complaint to the COBIS Complaint Review Panel

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The review panel will consist of members of the COBIS Board, who will be assigned to this task by the Chairman. These individuals will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complainant will have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and the relevant representatives from COBIS will be present. Each will have an opportunity to make written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant will be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied by a suitable companion, if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and the COBIS representatives will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and COBIS representatives have completed presenting their cases, they will be asked to leave. The evidence will then be considered.

The panel will subsequently collate its findings and make recommendations. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the subject of the complaint, and make a copy of the findings and recommendations available for inspection by the COBIS CEO or relevant COBIS representative.

Unacceptable complaints

An initial or follow-up complaint which is presented in a defamatory, abusive, offensive or threatening manner will be dismissed outright.

Persistent and Vexatious Complaints

Where a complainant tries to re-open an issue with COBIS after the complaints procedure has been fully exhausted and COBIS has done everything it reasonably can in response to the complaint, the COBIS Vice-Chairman (or the COBIS Chairman in the case of a complaint against the COBIS Vice-Chairman) will inform the complainant that the matter is closed.

If the complainant subsequently contacts COBIS again about the same issue, COBIS can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which COBIS will not respond is if:

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

This list not being exhaustive. COBIS will be most likely to choose not to respond if:

- COBIS has reason to believe the individual is contacting COBIS with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience, and/or
- The individual's letters/e-mails/telephone calls are often or always abusive or aggressive, and/or

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- The individual makes insulting personal comments about, or threats towards, COBIS staff

Unreasonable behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening will not be accepted. No response will be given in such instances.

Once COBIS has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing, either by letter or e-mail.

COBIS will ensure, when making this decision, that the complainants are heard, and that COBIS acts reasonably.

Record Keeping

COBIS 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 it will be secured commensurate with data legislation. It will be held centrally, and it will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint, or the members of the relevant review panel.

This Policy was created 06/18 and will be reviewed annually.

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