

ITE

Complaints

Policy

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ITE Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 We hope you are satisfied with your experience at NIoT. Your views are important to us. If you have a concern about an aspect of your experience at NIoT, you can let us know. Submitting a complaint is one option, but other options are available. You could try:
 - Giving feedback – via the Student Staff Consultative Committee
 - Speaking to a member of staff, such as your Tutor or Mentor
- 1.2 Unless otherwise stated, policies that refer to trainees also apply to trainee teachers on the following programmes:
 - NIoT School Direct Primary and Secondary Initial Teacher Education – salaried and non- salaried (fee-paying)
 - NIoT Postgraduate teaching apprenticeship (PGTA) apprentices. If you are studying on an apprenticeship and you need to raise a concern about your programme, or any other service that the NIoT has provided to you.
 - The policy also applies to the NIoT Assessment Only route for QTS.

2. Definition and Types of Complaints

- 2.1 A complaint may be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action, or about the standards of service provided by, or on behalf of, the NIoT.
- 2.2 In all instances, if a trainee (salaried school direct or PGTA apprentice) wishes to raise a complaint they should speak to their Managing Mentor or NIoT Tutor in the first instance. This is considered Stage 1 of the Complaints Process (see Section 12).
- 2.3 If a non-salaried (fee-paying) trainee teacher wishes to raise a complaint, they should speak to their NIoT tutor in the first instance. This is considered to be Stage 1 of the Complaints Process (see Section 12).
- 2.4 Examples of complaints include:
 - Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the provider.
 - Failure by the provider to meet obligations including those outlined in course/student handbooks
 - Concerns about the delivery, teaching or administration of a

programme including, where applicable, that provided by a partner provider.

- Poor quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided directly by the provider or any partners.
- Complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing a service on behalf of the provider.

3. Guiding principles

- 3.1 The aim of this Policy is to enable current trainees, or former trainees on the NIoT's ITE Training Programme to have their concerns heard and to seek redress as appropriate.
- 3.2 The intention is that complaints should be settled quickly and fairly and should be first dealt with as close to the source as possible, having already attempted to resolve this via either school-based or course-based support arrangements.
- 3.3 All complaints should be treated seriously, and trainees must not suffer any disadvantage or recrimination as a result of making a complaint in good faith. However, it is expected that trainees or people communicating on behalf of a trainee will conduct themselves responsibly and treat all those involved in the process with respect at all times.
- 3.4 The complaint must be one that lies within the remit of the NIoT to resolve, e.g. it must not be a complaint about matters determined by legislation or collective agreements.
- 3.5 A trainee who is a member of a Trade Union may consult that Trade Union's representative before invoking the complaint procedure but should raise the problem personally with their Managing Mentor or NIoT Tutor dependent on whether the trainee is salaried or non-salaried.
- 3.6 For the purposes of this policy a colleague is defined as a current registered trainee of the NIoT or a colleague employed at the trainee's placement school.
- 3.7 Trainees should recognise that in some cases in order to fully investigate the concerns raised and provide adequate answers this process may take longer to resolve.

In addition, please be aware of the following:

- Mediation can be a useful means of resolving matters of complaint where the parties involved are willing to engage voluntarily in the process in an attempt to work things out. The NIoT may make an offer of mediation at any stage of the NIoT's complaints procedure.
- Complaints must be substantiated with evidence, expressed in clear

and succinct English and submitted within prescribed timescales.

- Complaints submitted outside of the timescales stipulated in the procedure will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances and where there is good reason, supported by evidence, for the late submission.
- 3.8 The NIoT is committed to ensuring that complaints are handled in accordance with its published procedure.
- 3.9 The NIoT reserves the right to refuse to investigate or to suspend any investigation of a complaint where it becomes aware that police, legal, court or tribunal proceedings have been initiated in relation to the issues raised in the complaint.

4. Who can use the NIoT's ITE Complaints Policy

- 4.1 The NIoT's complaints procedure may only be used by:
- Current trainees or apprentices - an individual who is currently enrolled at the NIoT as trainee or apprentice teacher.
 - Former trainees or apprentices - an individual who has been enrolled at the NIoT and has left within the previous three months.
 - This applies to trainees at all NIoT delivery sites.
- 4.2 In addition, please be aware that:
- A group of trainees (two or more) may use this procedure to make a collective complaint provided that one trainee identifies themselves as the main contact for purposes of communication and has written consent from others that wish to be named as part of the complaint.
 - Anyone wishing to make a complaint is encouraged to do so personally but is not required to do so.
 - Anonymous complaints will not be considered unless there are exceptional and evidence-based reasons to do so. In many circumstances, raising a concern anonymously could impede the investigation and communication of the outcome.
- 4.3 If a complaint is raised during the informal or formal stages of another

procedure for example:

- Non-Academic Misconduct
- Stages of Support
- Academic Misconduct

The NIoT reserves the right to consider the issues raised within the context of that procedure rather than as a separate complaint. Concerns raised by a trainee about the outcome of a disciplinary process or a decision made under another specific regulation e.g. Fitness to Practise or Fitness to Study should usually be dealt with under those procedures and are not normally handled as complaints. However, the NIoT reserves the right to vary the process followed, as appropriate.

5. Complaints regarding Staff Members

- 5.1 Complaints relating to members of staff can be raised informally to the NIoT's Head of People by contacting hr@niot.org.uk. If a trainee wishes to make a formal complaint they should follow the Stage 2 procedure as outlined in this policy.
- 5.2 Following receipt of a formal complaint regarding a member of staff this will be acknowledged in line with Stage 2 and passed to the Head of People (or relevant HR nominee) to consider how the complaint is approached. The trainee will be updated on the complaint progress and receive a formal response once their complaint has been concluded. The complaint will be investigated by the HR Team in line with HR policies and Staff Disciplinary Procedures.
- 5.3 The timescales for responding to complaints under the ITE Complaints Policy do not apply when the complaint is being considered under HR procedures. The trainee will be advised in writing that the complaint is being dealt with in line with HR procedures and that timescales will differ from the stages as set out in this policy.
- 5.4 Where a complaint is about a member of staff, details will need to be shared with them to give the staff member the right to respond. If as part of our investigation a complaint against a member of staff is upheld, we will advise the trainee of the outcome but will not share specific details relating to individual members of staff.
- 5.5 Once the trainee is advised of the outcome of a formal complaint about a member of staff and this has been dealt with at Stage 2, they can escalate their complaint to Stage 3 in line with this policy.
- 5.6 The NIoT has a duty to make a significant and credible difference in protecting students from harassment and sexual misconduct and reducing the likelihood of it taking place, the NIoT's definitions of Harassment and Sexual Misconduct are outlined in the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy. Reports of Harassment and Sexual Misconduct by staff members raised through the formal complaint process will be considered under the Staff

Disciplinary Procedures and you will be advised of this and the timescales for any investigation.

6. Intentions

- 6.1 It is important that trainees raising concerns do so because they have a genuine issue that has not been resolved and they have contacted relevant colleagues within the NIoT or their school to try and resolve the concerns. There is an expectation not to engage in an unreasonable manner. Any trainee who is found to have made a malicious or vexatious claim, for example, for the purposes of damaging the career of a peer or colleague, may be subject to disciplinary action being taken through the non-academic misconduct or fitness to practise policy as appropriate.

7. Attendance at Meetings

- 7.1 The trainee raising the concern should make every effort to attend any meetings scheduled in relation to the complaint process.
- 7.2 The trainee will, where possible, be given 5 working days' notice of any meeting related to a complaint to ensure they are able to attend. They have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a colleague at any meeting related to their complaint.
- 7.3 As part of the Stage 2 process, if a meeting is required and has been scheduled with the appropriate notice, the trainee may request a postponement of the meeting once, to a time suitable for the trainee and their representative or colleague. The NIoT will postpone the meeting to a time proposed by the trainee provided that the alternative time is both reasonable and not more than 5 working days after the date originally proposed.
- 7.4 If the trainee or their representative fails to attend a re-scheduled Stage 2 meeting, then the investigator may continue with the investigation process in the trainee or representative's absence and make a decision based on the information available to them at the relevant time.
- 7.5 If the trainee is unable to attend the meeting due to ill health, then they can choose to: submit additional written information; confirm that the details of the complaint are contained within the original complaint submission.

8. Confidentiality

- 8.1 All individuals involved in this process have a responsibility to act professionally at all times. Information shared or obtained during the handling of a complaint will be treated sensitively.
- 8.2 Confidentiality will be preserved as far as is appropriate
- 8.3 If anyone involved in the process does not respect the confidentiality of the process and is sharing information inappropriately then action may be taken under other relevant policies or procedures for example Non-Academic Misconduct or Staff Disciplinary Procedures.

9. Trainee responsibilities:

- Trainees are expected to try to resolve a complaint directly, informally and quickly with the person/department concerned.
- If a trainee cannot resolve the complaint directly, they may prefer to approach their Managing Mentor or NIoT Tutor to discuss the complaint and try to resolve informally.
- Trainees are expected to explain clearly what the problem is and what outcome they are seeking.
- Trainees are expected to attend any investigation or informal meeting and be prepared to engage openly in discussion.
- It is expected that trainees will raise any informal concerns or complaints promptly after an issue arises, usually within 15 working days of the event occurring.
- Following the informal stage, if a satisfactory conclusion is not achieved then the trainee should progress the complaint in line with formal procedures outlined at Stage 2.

10. Managing Mentor or NIoT Tutor responsibilities:

- Try to resolve the complaint informally with the trainee.
- Staff dealing with complaints are encouraged, whenever practical, to meet with the trainee to establish the precise cause of dissatisfaction, to explore the remedy sought by the trainee and to foster a mutual understanding of the issues involved.
- The member of staff is expected to listen to the complaint and to try to resolve it in a straightforward, reasonable and prompt manner.
- If attempts at informal resolution are not successful, consult with the Head of ITE/AC ITE Lead, and ensure the trainee is aware of how the complaint can be progressed in line with formal procedures as necessary.
- Where appropriate, ensure the trainee is kept up to date with progress of the informal stage until the outcome has been communicated.

- Although informal, the member of staff should make notes of any meetings and keep a record of the agreed outcome. The staff member should provide the trainee with the agreed outcome of the informal stage in writing. The trainee should be notified that the matter is deemed to be resolved and advised of the availability of Stage 2 of the complaint's procedure, if the complaint is not upheld or the trainee is dissatisfied with the attempt at resolution.

11. Representative

- 11.1 At any stage of the formal procedure, the trainee concerned may be accompanied by:
 - A colleague
 - A Trade Union representative
- 11.2 The representative shall be allowed to address the hearing to put and sum up the trainee's case, respond on behalf of the trainee to any views expressed at the meeting and confer with the trainee during the hearing. The representative does not, however, have the right to answer questions on the trainee's behalf, address the hearing if the trainee does not wish it or prevent the employer/NIoT representative from explaining their case.
- 11.3 There will be no reprisals for the representative because they have supported a trainee through this process. The representative must respect the confidentiality of the complaint and should not discuss this matter with anyone other than the trainee they are supporting
- 11.4 If the representative is unavailable at the time the meeting is scheduled and will not be available for more than 5 working days afterwards, the trainee may be required to seek alternative representation.
- 11.5 If the choice of colleague is unsuitable, for example, if the representative has a conflict of interest, a trainee may be asked to choose someone else.
- 11.6 Trainees do not have the right to be accompanied by relatives, friends or legal advisers unless they also meet the criteria above.

12. Trainee Complaints Procedure

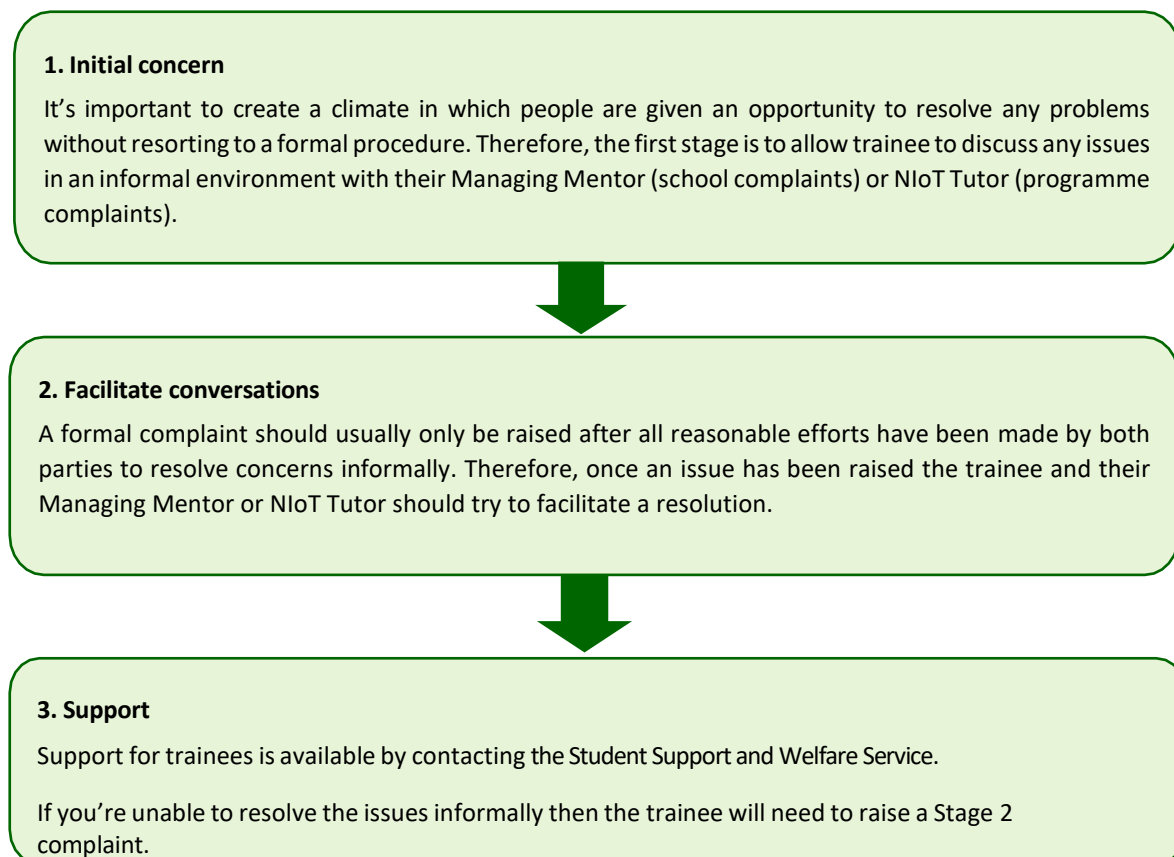
Stage 1: Informal Process

- 12.1 The trainee should speak to their Managing Mentor or NIoT Tutor to address the issue. It is expected that trainees will raise any informal concerns or complaints promptly after an issue arises, usually within 15 working days of the event occurring. If the issue involves the Managing Mentor or NIoT Tutor then they should speak to an appropriate senior manager, ideally the Head of ITE/AC ITE Lead. The trainee should receive a reply as soon as possible,

within 5 working days, even if it is only an interim reply.

- 12.2 The Managing Mentor or NIoT Tutor will then review the concerns raised by the trainee to try to resolve informally. They should then confirm back to the trainee the outcome of their review and what actions, if any, have been taken. If the trainee is satisfied by the outcome of their concern or informal complaint, the matter will be considered resolved. If the trainee is not satisfied with the outcome, they can then proceed to Stage 2. Only in exceptional circumstances should a complaint move straight to Stage 2.

Figure 1: Informal Process



Stage 2: Formal Complaint Process

- 12.3 If the trainee is not satisfied with the informal process, or if the complaint that is too serious in nature to be dealt with informally at Stage 1. A trainee should raise a formal complaint in writing including the remedy sought using the Stage 2 formal complaint form: <https://forms.office.com/e/7fVpGf3xV3>
- 12.4 Trainees should raise the Stage 2 formal complaint within 15 working days of the outcome of the informal stage or where the complaint is too serious and has not been dealt with informally, within 15 working days of the event which has given rise to the complaint or, if a series of events have given rise to the complaint, within 15 days of the final event.
- 12.5 On receipt of a complaint, the NIoT will acknowledge the complaint in two working days. The Academic Registrar (or nominee) will appoint an investigator who has had no previous involvement in the case. The investigator can be any senior leader within the NIoT.
- 12.6 Within 10 working days of the formal complaint being received the trainee will receive a written response outlining how the matter will be processed.
- 12.7 As part of the investigation, the investigator may request a meeting with the trainee so they can discuss the complaint. If a meeting is deemed necessary the trainee will be provided with 5 working days' notice of the meeting and the trainee will be entitled to bring a representative. The investigator may be accompanied at this meeting by another senior member of staff, or an appropriate member of staff from the NIoT.
- 12.8 The investigator will fully investigate the concerns raised by the trainee; this may include interviewing individuals involved in the complaint or as witnesses, as well as obtaining any relevant documentation.
- 12.9 The normal time limit for a written outcome shall be within 20 working days from the date the formal complaint form was submitted. However, if for a demonstrable, good reason the normal time limit does not allow sufficient time for the NIoT to conduct an appropriately thorough investigation, this time limit may be extended, and the trainee will be notified.
- 12.10 Once a comprehensive investigation has been carried out, the trainee will be advised of the outcome in writing. This will conclude Stage 2 of the complaints process.

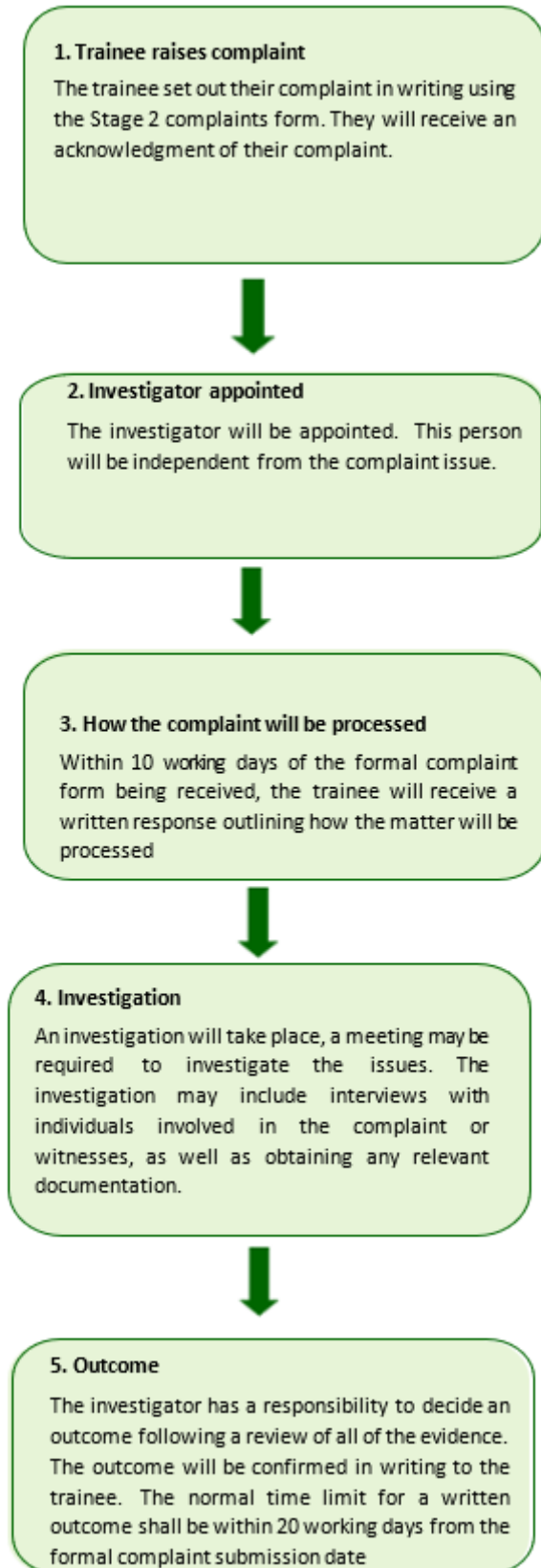
Responsibilities of Trainees at Stage 2

- Should a trainee wish to request any adjustments on the basis of a disability which will enable them to access the procedure effectively, they should contact complaints@niot.org.uk for further guidance.
- Trainees must provide a clear explanation of how they attempted to resolve their complaint informally at Stage 1. As a minimum, the explanation should include a specific date, a named member of staff to

whom the complaint was reported and why the complaint was not resolved to the trainees satisfaction at Stage 1. Trainees should provide a copy of any written Stage 1 resolution communication that is in their possession, or evidence of completion of the informal resolution stage.

- The trainees complaint must be substantiated by evidence. This may comprise one, or a series of the following types of evidence: a timeline of events, reference to relevant policies, procedures and/or regulations, letters, emails, independent medical evidence, reports by professionals, witness statements, screenshots. Any evidence or appendices relevant to the complaint must be submitted at the same time as the complaint and clearly referenced and labelled.
- Trainees are required to ensure that any evidence not written in English is translated and provided at the same time as the complaint paperwork
- If a trainees submission is unclear and the investigator identifies the need for any further information to assist their investigation, this will be requested from the trainee. It is expected that the trainee will supply the information, or explain why they cannot, within five working days.
- Trainees are expected to ensure that the reason for their complaint is clear, if the reason for the complaint is not clear the Stage 2 complaint may be returned to the trainee with a request for clarification which must be answered within five working days.
- It is the trainee's responsibility to make their case. Complaints may not be able to be investigated further if:
 - The trainees rationale for complaint is unclear
 - The trainee does not provide evidence
 - The trainee fails to include important dates, times and other details necessary for determining the eligibility of the complaint.

Figure 2: Stage 2 Complaint



Stage 3: Complaint Review

- 12.11 If a trainee is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, they can escalate their complaint to Stage 3 on the following grounds:
- They believe that a procedural irregularity has occurred in the handling and/or the investigation of the Stage 2 complaint and/or
 - They are in possession of additional evidence which may have affected the outcome at Stage 2 but was unavailable at the time of the original Stage 2 investigation and/or
 - They have a compelling argument to demonstrate that the outcome at Stage 2 was unreasonable. Claims of this nature must be supported by evidence and a clear rationale for the unreasonable nature of the decision. Claims that amount simply to an expression of dissatisfaction with the decision will not be considered.
- 12.12 The trainee should submit the NIoT's Stage 3 Complaints Form within 10 working days of notification of the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint. A trainee should raise a request for consideration at Stage 3 using the form: <https://forms.office.com/e/QKZrcu2NQj>.
- 12.13 The trainee must set out the grounds of the complaint by making reference to the above standards, and must provide evidence to support their claim, including proof of why new evidence being presented was not available at the time of the submission of their Stage 2 complaint.
- 12.14 Trainees will receive confirmation of receipt of their Stage 3 complaint within 2 working days. The Director of Registry Services will undertake an initial evaluation to check that the complaint is submitted within the appropriate deadlines and is in the required format with supporting evidence. If the Director of Registry Services deems there to be insufficient information, they will contact the trainee to supply further information. It is expected that the trainee will supply the information, or explain why they cannot, within five working days.
- 12.15 Following initial evaluation the Director of Registry Services will nominate a Reviewer to conduct the Stage 3 Complaint Review. The Reviewer will be a member of the NIoT's Senior Management Team not previously involved in the matter.
- 12.16 The Reviewer will determine if there are adequate grounds and will review the procedures undertaken at Stage 2 and the reasonableness of the outcome.
- 12.17 The review stage will not usually consider the issues afresh or involve further investigation. However, in the case that new evidence has been submitted and accepted, additional investigation may be required. In reaching a decision, the reviewer is expected to be fair and reasonable.

- 12.18 As part of the review, the Reviewer may request a meeting with the trainee so they can discuss the complaint. If a meeting is deemed necessary, the trainee will be provided with 5 working days' notice of the meeting and the trainee will be entitled to bring a representative. The Reviewer may be accompanied at this meeting by another member of NIoT staff.
- 12.19 The Reviewer will communicate the outcome of the Complaint Review in a Completion of Procedures letter within 20 working days of the NIoT's acknowledgement of receipt of the Stage 3 Review Form. If for a demonstrable, good reason the normal time limit does not allow sufficient time for the NIoT to conduct an appropriately thorough review, this time limit may be extended, and the trainee will be notified.
- 12.20 The Completion of Procedures letter will confirm the outcome of the Complaint Review along with the reasons for why the decision has been made. It will also include details of how to take the case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education if they remain dissatisfied.

13. Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)

- 13.1 If the trainee remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint following completion of Stage 3 and receipt of the NIoT's Completion of Procedures letter, they may take their complaint to the OIA. The OIA will not normally review complaints unless they have been considered through the NIoT's own complaints procedure. The trainee must submit their complaint in writing using the OIA complaint form which can be found on the OIA's website OIA Complaint Form (oiahe.org.uk).
- 13.2 The OIA must receive the trainees complaint form within 12 months from the date of the Completion of Procedures letter received following Stage 3 under this Complaints Procedure. Guidance on submitting a complaint to OIA can be found on the OIA's website. Students should note that the OIA will not review complaints about an application for admission to the NIoT unless the individual is a former trainee of the NIoT.

14. Maintenance of Records

- 14.1 All relevant documentation will be kept securely and will only be made available to individuals whose duties require access to this information.
- 14.2 In certain circumstances all papers obtained and created whilst dealing with a complaint may have to be fully disclosed for example, at an employment tribunal.

15. Quality Assurance

- 15.1 Complaints form part of the NIoT's process of quality review and improvement and are considered as providing valuable feedback rather than criticism. The NIoT will widely publicise information about procedures to trainees and staff.
- 15.2 Trainees will be notified early in the process if the remedy sought within the complaint is beyond the power of the NIoT to deliver.

16. Recording and monitoring of complaints

- 15.3 It is important that complaints are monitored in order to improve the trainee experience. NIoT processes personal data collected during the policy in accordance with our data protection policy. In particular, data collected as part of informal complaints is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of responding to the complaints or conducting the complaints policy. You should immediately report any inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data in accordance with our data protection policy as this constitutes a data protection breach.
- 15.4 The NIoT's Academic Registrar will record and provide reports to indicate the nature of complaints and complainants, and resultant action. Such reports will:
- Feed into the monitoring and evaluation procedure at various levels of the NIoT.
 - Feed directly into appropriate NIoT-wide committees.
 - Assist in identifying problems and trends across the NIoT
 - Form the basis of positive publicity, in demonstrating that identified issues have been resolved.