Independent Members: Trust Complaints Panels

Volunteer Roles

Girls' Learning Trust

1. Purpose of the Role

The Girls' Learning Trust (the GLT) is seeking to establish a pool of independent individuals who can be called upon to serve as members of Stage Three Complaints Panels across its schools. Stage Three is the final stage of the Trust's internal complaints procedure, providing an opportunity for complaints that remain unresolved following Stages One and Two to receive independent and impartial consideration.

Independent Panel Members play an important role in providing objective scrutiny of how complaints have been investigated and addressed, helping to ensure that decisions are fair, reasonable, evidence-informed and consistent with relevant policies and procedures.

The GLT wishes to develop a diverse pool of individuals with relevant professional experience, skills and perspectives. This will enable the Trust to constitute appropriately experienced and independent Panels when required, while providing flexibility to accommodate members' availability and any potential conflicts of interest.

Membership of the pool does not involve a fixed commitment or regular meetings. Individuals will be contacted when a suitable Panel opportunity arises and may indicate their availability on a case-by-case basis.

2. Why Volunteer as an Independent Panel Member?

We recognise that individuals volunteering for these roles bring valuable professional experience and perspectives. In return, participation offers an opportunity to:

- Make a positive contribution to education: Help ensure that concerns raised by parents and carers are considered fairly, independently and transparently, supporting confidence in schools and their decision-making.
- Develop transferable skills: Gain experience in evidence evaluation, procedural fairness, impartial decision-making and collaborative deliberation, relevant to governance, leadership and professional roles.
- Gain insight into school governance: Develop a greater understanding of how schools and multi-academy trusts operate, including the challenges involved in balancing individual concerns, organisational responsibilities and regulatory requirements.
- Work with experienced professionals: Collaborate with Trustees, Governors and other independent members from a range of professional backgrounds.
- Volunteer flexibly: Contribute on an occasional basis, with no fixed ongoing commitment. Members can accept invitations to participate in individual Panels according to their availability.

This is an opportunity to use your professional skills to make a meaningful difference, without taking on the ongoing responsibilities of a Trustee or school Governor.

3. Key Responsibilities

Independent Panel Members are expected to:

- Review documentation: Consider the original complaint, Stage One and Stage Two findings, the complainant's reasons for remaining dissatisfied, and relevant supporting evidence.
- Assess procedural fairness: Determine whether the complaint has been handled appropriately, fairly and in accordance with the Trust's Complaints Policy and relevant school procedures.
- Evaluate decisions: Consider whether previous findings and conclusions were reasonable, proportionate and supported by the available evidence.

- Participate in hearings: Attend Stage Three Panel hearings (often held virtually via MS Teams), listen carefully to representations from the complainant and school or Trust, and ask relevant, constructive questions.
- Exercise independent judgement: Contribute objectively to Panel deliberations, considering all relevant perspectives without favouring either party.
- Determine findings and recommendations: Work collaboratively with fellow Panel Members to reach clear, reasoned conclusions and identify any appropriate recommendations or improvements.
- Maintain confidentiality: Handle sensitive information appropriately and comply with the Trust's expectations regarding confidentiality, safeguarding and data protection.

The Panel's purpose is to review the handling and outcome of the complaint, rather than undertake a fresh investigation or rehear matters already considered at earlier stages.

4. Person Specification

The GLT welcomes expressions of interest from individuals with experience of governance, education, public services, professional regulation, complaints handling, HR, legal services or other relevant professional backgrounds. Successful individuals should demonstrate:

- Sound judgement, objectivity and the ability to consider complex or sensitive information impartially.
- Strong analytical skills and an ability to distinguish relevant evidence from opinion or unsupported assertions.
- Effective listening, questioning and communication skills.
- An understanding of fairness, proportionality and procedural accountability.
- The confidence to challenge constructively and contribute to collective decision-making.
- Professional integrity, discretion and respect for confidentiality.

Previous experience of school governance or complaints panels would be beneficial but is not essential. Appropriate briefing and procedural guidance will be provided.

5. Independence and Eligibility

In accordance with the GLT's Complaints Policy, each Stage Three Panel must include at least one member who is entirely independent of the Trust's management and governance. Independent Members must have no current involvement in the GLT's management or governance, no prior involvement in the complaint being considered, and no personal or professional interests that could compromise their impartiality.

Appointments to individual Panels are subject to approval by the Chair of Trustees and appropriate declarations of interest.

6. Commitment and Practical Arrangements

Stage Three Panels are convened as required, rather than according to a fixed schedule. Independent Members will be contacted about their availability for individual hearings, with no expectation that they must accept every invitation. Each appointment will ordinarily involve reviewing a written evidence pack in advance, attending the Panel hearing (either remotely or in person, as arranged), participating in private deliberations and contributing to the Panel's findings and recommendations.

Further information available via: complaints@girlslearningtrust.org