

[Home](#) ▾ [Education, training and skills](#) ▾ [Running and managing a school](#) ▾ [School admissions](#)  
▾ [Academies admission appeals complaints review](#)



[Department](#)  
[for Education](#)

Corporate report

# Academies admission appeals complaints review: academic year 2025 to 2026

Published 26 March 2026

## Applies to England

[Contents](#)

[Who this publication is for](#)

[The role of the School Complaints Compliance Unit](#)

[Overview](#)

[Key findings](#)

[Recommendations](#)

[Preparation for admission appeal hearings](#)

[Additional information](#)

This document sets out key data from the School Complaints Compliance Unit's (SCCU) review of complaints about the handling of academy admission appeals received between 1 April 2025 and 30 November 2025. It also suggests what steps academies and clerks can take to ensure future appeals are compliant with the [school admission appeals code](#) (SAAC).

# Who this publication is for

This guidance is in relation to academies and for:

- clerks to independent admission appeal panels
- panel members
- academy admission authorities

## The role of the School Complaints Compliance Unit

The Department for Education's (DfE) SCCU is responsible for considering complaints made about academy admissions independent appeal panel (IAP) hearings, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education.

We consider whether the panel hearing followed the procedures set out in the SAAC.

We do not consider a complaint about an appeal hearing if it was held more than 6 months ago (unless there are exceptional circumstances), complaints about the panel's decision or the weight given to specific evidence.

If we find actions which could have affected the panel's decision, we may recommend the academy reviews its appeal procedures and holds a fresh appeal with a different panel.

DfE has published [guidance for admission authorities, clerks, appeal panels and parents and guardians](#) to support those involved in admission appeals to understand their roles and responsibilities and the process.

## Overview

During the period 1 April 2025 to 30 November 2025, we received 284 complaints

of maladministration by appeal panels.

Of the 284 cases, 120 complaints were within the SCCU's remit for consideration. We found that in most cases, the appeal panel hearings had adhered to the statutory regulations in place at the time of the hearing.

We upheld 45 complaints of maladministration. Of these, 19 complaints resulted in a request that the admission authority offered a fresh appeal. In the remaining 26 upheld complaints, we found that whilst maladministration may have occurred, this had not affected the outcome of the appeal hearing (maladministration without injustice).

Where we found maladministration without injustice, we asked the admission authority to review their procedures in light of our findings.

In addition to these 45 cases, we withdrew 7 complaints where the admission authority had offered the appellant a fresh appeal and 2 where the admission authority offered the child a place at the school before we had completed our consideration of the complaint.

Of the complaints where the SCCU found maladministration of the IAP process, there were some common areas of non-compliance which we have summarised below.

## Key findings

Whilst each case is considered on its individual circumstances, we have identified some common issues that continue to contribute towards findings of maladministration. Common reasons for complaints included:

- timescales not being adhered to
- failure to provide relevant information prior to the appeal hearing
- decision letters containing incorrect or inaccurate information
- arrangements that were not complaint with the SAAC

Of the complaints that we upheld, the key issues included the following.

Administrative errors, such as:

- failure to give the required 10 days' notice of the appeal hearing (SAAC 2.1b)
- failure to ensure appellants are aware of the appeal hearing date and time (SAAC 2.7)
- delays in holding appeal hearings (SAAC 2.3)
- delays in issuing the panel's decision letter (SAAC 2.27)
- failure to provide the panel members' names in advance of the hearing (SAAC 2.10)
- failure to advise appellants of their right to call witnesses or be represented at the hearing (SAAC 2.13)

Clerk's notes that did not clearly evidence:

- that the panel had given due consideration to whether the admission authority is able to demonstrate prejudice over and above the fact that the published admission number had been reached (SAAC 3.10)
- that the panel had given due consideration to all the appellant's reasons for expressing a preference for the school, including what that school can offer the child that the allocated or other schools cannot (SAAC 3.8)
- the written information received and considered (SAAC 2.24c)
- the panel's voting (SAAC 2.29)

Decision letters that do not meet the requirements of SAAC 2.27 and 2.28 because they:

- included inaccurate information
- included information that seemed to relate to another appellant's case
- failed to include the evidence that the panel had considered
- did not give clear reasons for the panel's decision
- were not signed by the clerk or the chair
- did not provide accurate information about how to raise a complaint about the handling of an appeal hearing

Appellants unable to engage fully in remote or hybrid hearings, in accordance with SAAC 2.16, due to:

- technical issues with remote audio or video hearings
- failure to consider an adjournment or make alternative arrangements where an

appellant fails or is unable to attend either a remote or in-person hearing

## Recommendations

We have published [guidance for clerks and appeal panels](#) which provides information to support clerks and panels to conduct their roles effectively and ensure that appeal hearings are conducted in a fair, transparent and consistent manner.

This guidance includes suggestions that will help prevent common complaints on some of the key issues that we have found, including:

- the information given to appellants at the start of the hearing
- management and setting the etiquette of remote hearings
- the level of detail to include in the clerk's record of the hearing

Clerks should pay particular attention to all aspects of their record keeping as this will be a key source of evidence if an appellant raises a complaint about the conduct or administration of the hearing.

We recommend that clerks and panels review this guidance alongside their established processes.

## Preparation for admission appeal hearings

Arrangements for school admission appeal hearings must comply with the [SAAC](#), to which academies are bound by the terms of their funding agreement. In preparing for appeals, admission authorities must publish their appeals timetable, setting out the relevant deadlines for parents and guardians, on their website by 28 February each year.

Admission authorities may make arrangements for appeal hearings to be held in person or remotely by video conference or a mixture of the two. Appeal hearings held entirely by telephone are permitted only where video conferencing cannot be used for reasons relating to connectivity or accessibility, and if the appellant and

presenting officer both agree. Admission authorities may wish to consider how they record their rationale for holding appeals remotely or by telephone.

Admission authorities must consider any reasonable adjustments requested to enable an appellant to participate in the appeal hearing and consider these adjustments when deciding the format of the appeal.

Regardless of the forum chosen, appeal panels must allow appellants the opportunity to make oral representations.

Appeal panels perform a judicial function and must be transparent, accessible, independent, and impartial, and operate according to principles of natural justice.

Appeal hearing complaints can take several weeks, sometimes months, to resolve, leaving a child and their parents and guardians uncertain about their future education.

To ensure appellants receive a fair hearing and do not need to make a maladministration complaint, in line with the SAAC, DfE expects the admission authority to ensure that the [appointed clerk and panel members](#):

- are trained in admissions law and provide clear written information to appellants before the appeal hearing, in line with timescales set out in section 2 of the SAAC
- explain the process at the start of each hearing so that appellants and panel members are clear on what to expect from the meeting
- treat appellants and all involved in the panel hearing fairly and consistently, considering appellants may have less experience of the appeal process than representatives of the admission authority
- properly understand and address each case on its individual merits
- take records of proceedings, which may include, but is not limited to:
  - start and end times
  - attendance and format in which attendees have joined
  - all relevant points raised at the hearing
  - any adjournments and the reasons for these
  - voting and reasons for decisions
  - any decisions taken in relation to request for reasonable adjustments
- provide 'plain English' decision letters, giving clear reasons for the decision outcome and a summary of relevant factors that were raised by both parties and considered by the panel

- make clear to appellants the basis by which complaints can be made to DfE following an appeal and that they can only be based on maladministration rather than the panel's decision

## Additional information

Admission authorities are responsible for ensuring records of proceedings and any other evidence requested from the clerk is made available to DfE upon request following receipt of a complaint about an appeal.

Admission authorities should ensure they inform appellants that if they are dissatisfied with the way an independent panel has handled their academy admission appeal, they can complain to DfE via the [customer help portal](#) or by contacting:

School Complaints Compliance Unit  
Department for Education  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

Please ensure a copy of the above details is included in the clerk's decision letter following an appeal.

[↑ Back to top](#)

---

## Help us improve GOV.UK

To help us improve GOV.UK, we'd like to know more about your visit today. [Please fill in this survey \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

---



## Services and information

---

[Benefits](#)

[Births, death, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

---

## Government activity

---

[Departments](#)

[News](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Transparency](#)

[How government works](#)

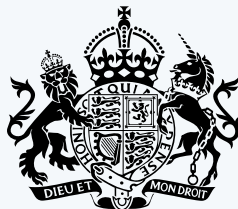
[Get involved](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#)

[Terms and conditions](#) [Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#)

**OGL**

All content is available under the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated



© Crown copyright