

Policy Statement:

Vantastic is committed to taking seriously any complaint that concerned individuals have about the service. It believes that if an individual wishes to make a complaint or register a concern, they should find it easy.

Purpose:

This policy is intended to ensure that complaints are dealt with properly and addressed professionally and that improvements are made due to complaints.

Scope:

This policy covers all actions to be taken for a complaint by a concerned individual. Concerned individuals can include service users, community members, and concerned stakeholders (funders, external agencies, etc.). A complaint by a member of staff is addressed through the grievance process (see Grievance Procedure). Difficulties in relation to harassment or equality should be dealt with through the relevant policies in the Employee Policy & Procedures.

Complaints can be made against any aspect of Vantastic.

While all complaints need to be addressed, the scope of this policy is principally concerned with expressions of dissatisfaction for which the involvement of management would be necessary rather than informal feedback.

We are unable to accept complaints relating to matters listed below. These are all dealt with under separate policies and procedures:

- Third-party concerns about the contents of Vantastic reports;
- Matters relating to employee relations in Vantastic;
- Data subject requests made under the EU General Data Protection Regulation, 2016/679 (GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 or the Freedom of Information Act 2014;
- Any matter actively under investigation by the Office of the Ombudsman;
- Any matter which is the subject of a proposed or ongoing independent inquiry or legal proceedings; or
- A complaint or feedback which is considered to be vexatious or frivolous.

Principles:

- It is Vantastic's policy to welcome complaints and look upon them as an opportunity to learn, adapt, improve and provide better services.
- All complaints should be responded to and then resolved promptly and within the timescale outlined.
- Vantastic supports the concept that most complaints if dealt with early, openly and honestly, can be sorted out at a local level between just the complainant and the organisation.
- Complainants should be consulted about what they would like to happen about their complaint.
- All persons involved should be supported and given appropriate assistance throughout the process.
- Investigation and communication will follow principles of natural justice and will respect all parties.
- The complaints process will be well publicised. Service users and their representatives should be aware of how to complain and that the organisation provides easy to use opportunities for them to register their complaints.
- All complaints must be appropriately recorded in a consistent manner. Complaints should be kept at a centralised location and monitored for quality purposes.
- People may wish to provide constructive feedback rather than a complaint, and this should be facilitated.
- Complainants may also wish to withdraw their complaint. However, Vantastic may need to continue investigating if the complaint is deemed significant enough and depending on the grounds for withdrawal.

Complaints Procedure:

Who can complain?

- Anyone who is a client/service user of Vantastic.
- An advocate may complain on the service user's behalf, provided they have the service user's written consent.
- A parent/guardian may complain on behalf of a child who is a client.
- Any member of the local community.
- Anyone who is an organisational member of Vantastic or who engages with us on social media, policy work etc.
- Any external stakeholder (funders, external agencies, etc.).
- A concerned individual can complain about any aspect of the service that has impacted them or the organisation they represent in a way that they perceive to be negative.

What can complaints be about?

- Any aspect of the work of Vantastic
- A decision made about a client, member, social media follower
- A member of the Vantastic Team (staff)
- A Vantastic policy position, communications, campaign etc.

How can complaints be made?

- All complaints should be made to the Operations Manager whereby the complaint lies.
- The Operations Manager will bring the complaint to the attention of the CEO, however, the Operations Manager will implement the Complaints policy firstly to resolve the complaint at hand and reduce escalation of the issue.
- If the complaint is about the Operations Manager, then the complaint should be dealt with by another Vantastic Manager or the CEO, whichever is deemed more appropriate at the time.
- All complaints should ultimately be referred to the CEO. If the complaint is against the CEO, the complaint should be made to the Chairperson of the Board on info@vantastic.ie

Complaint Record Forms

- Complaint Record Forms are available on www.vantastic.ie, by request from the Operations Manager or any Vantastic Customer Service team member.

Verbal/informal complaints:

All verbal or informal complaints or feedback, no matter how seemingly unimportant, should be taken seriously. The team member who receives the verbal complaint may be able to resolve the issue and informal resolution of any difficulty is always desirable. However, the complainant should always be offered the following options:

- To make a written/formal complaint;
- To elevate the complaint to the Operations Manager for response
- To advance the complaint further to the CEO for response;
- To provide feedback anonymously or identifiably through the online Feedback form.

The team member should note the verbal complaint in the Complaint Register (noting date, time, the name of person/organisation making the complaint; nature of the complaint; resolution if any, and named manager handling the complaint. Contact details for the complainant should also be recorded.)

If the verbal complaint concerns a member of the Vantastic Team (Staff Members), please see the next section.

The CEO should be informed of all complaints regularly by team members or their line managers. The Complaints Register is the responsibility of the Operations Manager.

Complaints involving the Vantastic Team (Staff Members):

All complaints about the Vantastic Team will be taken seriously, and the complainant will be asked if they would like to make a formal complaint that will be investigated or would they like to provide informal constructive feedback. The complainant should immediately be referred to the Operations Manager for this conversation (unless the complaint concerns the Operations Manager, and if so, referral should be to another Manager). At any time, the Operations Manager or the complainant can escalate the complaint to the CEO.

If the complaint is formal, it will need to be written up either directly by the complainant or by the person handling the complaint. An agreed process and timeline will be written up for an investigation into the complaint as needed. An investigation may not be warranted by the person handling the complaint, and s/he may communicate directly back to the complainant in writing to this effect. All communication should also be brought to the attention of the CEO just for transparency. If an investigation is warranted, then the person handling the complaint will determine who is most appropriate to investigate. As soon as possible, the team member will be informed about the complaint concerning them and informed about the investigation process and timeline. The objective will be to resolve the complaint to everyone's satisfaction, if possible, using principles of natural justice and with an awareness of relevant legislation.

Written/Formal complaints:

Written or formal complaints should be passed to the Operations Manager and the CEO/Chair as appropriate for review. Copies of the Complaints Record Form will be made available, and if possible, complainants should be directed to this, but written feedback will be accepted in any form.

Following a review of the written complaint, the Operations Manager and/or the CEO/Chair will devise a draft proposal in relation to the investigation steps and timeline and will communicate directly with the complainant in the first instance. The Operations Manager or CEO/Chair will determine who is most appropriate to undertake the investigation. If the written complaint is concerning a Vantastic Team Member, the section above will be followed.

Investigation:

The appointed investigator will use the agreed process and timeline to investigate the complaint using methods such as minuted conversations with the complainant, written correspondence, relevant Vantastic team members, other clients or other relevant parties. The investigation may also reference applicable policies, procedures and other documents either from Vantastic or a stakeholder. The investigation will respect all principles of natural justice, respect, good communication and will not undermine any aspects of the Employee Handbook or relevant legislation. All parties will be informed that they are welcome to have someone appropriate (but not a legal representative) with them for meetings. All parties will sign all relevant minutes. If necessary, the appointed investigator will seek additional expertise if necessary from inside or outside Vantastic.

If the complaint is made on the client/member's behalf, their consent must be obtained from the complainant.

The purpose of the investigation will be to establish all relevant facts related to the complaint and identify recommendations and/or ameliorative actions if appropriate. If the complainant's proposed outcome is not judged satisfactory by the organisation, the complainant will be provided with a written rationale for the decision. These will be minuted on the Complaint Record Form.

The investigation will be completed within ten working days (unless otherwise agreed), and relevant parties, particularly the complainant, will be informed of any outcomes in writing and verbally.

If the complaint raises potentially serious matters, advice should be sought from a legal advisor. If legal action is taken at this stage, any investigation by the organisation under the complaints procedure should cease immediately.

Appeals Process:

If one of the parties to the complaints process is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, a meeting should be set up with the Operations Manager, CEO, and if appropriate, the Chairperson/HR expert on the Board of Vantastic within four weeks. The complainant and/or the respondent will be entitled to bring a family member or an appropriate advocate who is not a legal representative. The minutes and any recommendations of this meeting will be communicated in writing and verbally within five working days.

The decision of this committee is final, and the complainant will be considered to have exhausted all avenues within Vantastic.

Anonymous Complaints:

Anonymous complaints or complaints made under a false identity raise both practical problems and issues concerning fairness. The reason for this is that an investigation cannot be undertaken. Of particular importance is that a member of the Vantastic team cannot adequately respond to the issues raised if a complaint has been made in this way. The Operations Manager and or CEO/Chair may also not be in a position to undertake any remedial actions where there is not a full agreement on the issue as described in the complaint.

In the event that an anonymous complaint is received, Vantastic will note the issues raised and, where necessary, try and resolve them appropriately. An anonymous complaint may still be referred for investigation, however in the following circumstances:

- If there was good reason why the complaint was being made on an anonymous basis, for example, if there was a concern by the complainant that if their identity was revealed, it could adversely affect their health or well-being. This may depend on the seriousness of the allegation being made and should be at the discretion of the CEO/Chair.
- If the allegation can be properly investigated by reference to a third-party witness or documented evidence provided with the complaint without further contact with the complainant.
- If the complaint involves a minor or a vulnerable adult. That being the case, all complaints should be investigated and handled confidentially according to the Vantastic Safeguarding of Person at Risk of Abuse & Children First Policy.

Written Records

All complaints will be recorded in writing as already described; relevant documents include:

- Complaints Register for verbal/informal complaints
- Complaints Records Form will be stored centrally by the investigator, i.e. CEO or Chair. Each complainant will have a file, and a communication log will be maintained in the file about all contact, meetings, conversations, emails etc. This should be in line with all relevant steps of the Complaints Policy and should be transparent and available to all parties involved in the specific complaint as requested.
- Vantastic Team Members personnel files if the disciplinary process has been invoked as part of the outcome of an investigation into a complaint. Then relevant documentation will be recorded as per the Disciplinary Policy.

Oversight of complaints

Investigation, review and outcomes from complaints are undertaken at the highest levels in Vantastic– either by the Operations Manager, the CEO or Chair of the Board. Written records will be maintained concerning all complaints and all actions concerning them according to data protection guidelines.

It is the policy of Vantastic;

- that the Operations Manager reports to the CEO regularly on complaints received
- that an overview (*numbers and status*) of all complaints is provided in Monthly Operations Management reports to the Board.
- That the Board Audit and Risk Committee reviews all complaints annually as part of regular governance review.

Revision History

Revision	Date of Release	Purpose
V1.0	May 2021	Initial Release