

Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints Procedure

1.0 Purpose and Scope

To inform customers, applicants, students, employers, agencies, staff, visitors and community of the procedure for compliments, suggestions and complaints concerning South & City College Birmingham. **This policy does NOT apply to the student disciplinary issues – please see our Disciplinary Policy for further details.**

2.0 Compliments and Suggestions

The college always welcomes compliments and any suggestions for improvements to our students' learning experience. The College will share compliments and suggestions with relevant managers and staff, and we will record the outcomes of any suggestions made and if it was possible to implement.

3.0 Stage 1: Early Resolution, Informal Complaints or Concerns

Most complaints or concerns can be resolved informally and at an early stage. Complaints or concerns should be directed to an appropriate person within 5 days of the incident or concern occurring. An appropriate person could be for example an admissions officer during enrolment, a facilities support manager about the environment or a personal tutor about a concern relating to studies. If there is any doubt about who to contact, or if a complainant feels it is more appropriate, then the complaint or concern can be discussed with an appropriate manager. Reception staff, Student Engagement Team and Tutors can also provide advice on who would be the most appropriate person to discuss a complaint or concern with.

Informal complaints or concerns are normally raised in person or via email. It is expected that most complaints will be resolved using this early informal stage. Complaints being made after 5 days of the concern or incident occurring will not be considered, unless there are exceptional circumstances to support a later complaint.

4.0 Stage 2: Formal Complaints

If a complaint has not been resolved at the informal stage, a complainant may elect to proceed by submitting a formal complaint. This stage of the complaints process may also be used if the nature of the complaint is complex or too serious for the informal stage to be appropriate. The College will normally only consider a complaint that has been submitted within 10 working days of the incident or concern occurring.

The formal complaints procedure is designed to deal with, but is not limited to:

- Complaints raised in relation to college activities, staff and services
- Complaints regarding any form of discrimination
- Complaints relating to facilities, equipment or resources

The formal complaints procedure will not be used for:

- Staff grievances and collective staff disputes are referred to the staff grievance procedure.
- Appeals against student exclusions will be referred to the Student Disciplinary Procedure.
- Academic appeals will be referred to the relevant academic appeals procedure which applies to a student's studies.
- Complaints submitted anonymously as the College will not be able to investigate these fairly.

4.1 Submitting a Complaint

Complaint forms can be collected from the Customer Service Team, Student Engagement Team or downloaded from Moodle or the College website. Completed forms can be handed to Customer Services staff at any college site.

Complaints can also be submitted via email to feedback@sccb.ac.uk, or in writing to:

Customer Feedback Office
South & City College Birmingham
Hall Green Campus
Cole Bank Road
Hall Green
Birmingham
B28 8ES

Complainants should provide current contact information together with all supporting information regarding the complaint e.g. relevant documentation, dates, locations any witnesses if appropriate. Failure to submit any relevant and available supporting evidence may be detrimental to the outcome of a complaint. Complainants should also detail any previous attempts to resolve the problem and what outcome is being sought in order to resolve the complaint. Students may access advice and support through the Student Engagement Team or Students' Union for submitting a formal complaint.

If a complaint is made on behalf of a person in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018, South and City College Birmingham will not discuss matters with third parties, but will instead, through a nominated member of the Management team, raise the matter directly with the individual concerned in an appropriate manner to confirm their willingness to advance the complaint.

A formal complaint raised on behalf of a student under the age of 18, will not begin until the College has received written consent from the student for the parent / guardian / appropriate adult to act on their behalf in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Some complaints will require the College to take swift action, these are for example, a complaint involving a threat of serious harm or where there is a risk that the issue raised could be detrimental to an individual's mental health. In these circumstances the College's Safeguarding Officer will be informed and appropriate action taken to protect the complainant or individual.

The Customer Feedback Office will acknowledge receipt of the complaint (via email) within 5 working days, outlining the steps that will be taken next in the process (including an outline of the next stage of the process).

4.2 Complaint Investigation

The Customer Feedback Office, will assign the complaint to an appropriate manager (or nominee) who where possible, has had no previous involvement in the matter, and they will communicate directly with the complainant within 5 days of receiving the complaint from the Customer Feedback Office.

The manager (or nominee) will initially evaluate the complaint to ensure the complaint has been submitted using the correct procedures, within the time limit and in the required format. The outcome of this initial evaluation could be:

1. The complainant being referred to a different procedure or process, such as academic appeals
2. The complaint being rejected, for example because it has been submitted late
3. The complaint continuing to the formal investigation

When the complaint has been accepted for investigation, the investigating manager will:

1. Review any evidence submitted
2. Contact the complainant to discuss the issue or concern to clarify issues and discuss possible outcomes that are reasonable and within the power of the College to deliver following the formal complaint process
3. Talk to any key staff or students related to the issue or concern
4. Review any further documentation or evidence relevant to the complaint

The investigating officer may refer the complaint to a senior manager for any recommendations to be agreed or another appropriate member of staff to request a second opinion to ensure the most appropriate outcome of the complaint is achieved. Information gathered during the investigation will be recorded.

The manager (or nominee) assigned to the complaint for investigation will provide a response in writing within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. The response will explain the outcome of the complaint and the reasons for any decisions made.

The outcome of the complaint will be:

1. The complaint is upheld either wholly or partially
2. The complaint is not upheld

Complainants will also be provided with information about:

1. Rights to take the complaint to a review stage
2. The time limit and process for escalating the complaint to the review stage
3. Where to access support

In some more complex cases, it may not be possible to resolve a complaint within 10 days. If this is the case, the complainant will be advised, at the earliest opportunity, of the circumstances resulting in this unforeseen delay and will be kept informed of progress by the investigating manager.

5.0 Stage 3: Review of a Complaint (Appeal)

5.1 Requesting a Review of a Complaint

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal complaint, there may be grounds to request a review.

Anyone who wishes to request a review must write to the Assistant Principal: Student Engagement within 10 working days of the date of the complaint response letter:

C/o Customer Feedback Office
South & City College Birmingham
Hall Green Campus
Cole Bank Road
Hall Green
Birmingham
B28 8ES

Alternatively, a written request can be emailed to feedback@sccb.ac.uk

The request for review should outline:

1. The grounds for review; this should not re-iterate the original complaint but state the reasons why the outcome is not satisfactory.
2. Additional evidence that may be relevant and why it wasn't available at the time of the original complaint.
3. Any aspect of the response or action taken that is considered inadequate.
4. The response or action that would be considered appropriate by the complainant.

The Assistant Principal: Student Engagement (or nominee) will consider the request for review and will establish the purpose and scope of the review, a review of a complaint will not normally consider the issue or concern afresh or involve further investigation. The Assistant Principal: Student Engagement (or nominee) will confirm to the complainant within 10 working days the purpose and scope of a review and will be clear what can be considered at this stage. It may be more appropriate to refer the review back to the formal complaint stage based on, for example, new evidence.

The Assistant Principal: Student Engagement or nominated person will consider:

1. Were the relevant procedures followed?
2. Was the outcome reasonable?
3. Has the complainant received clear reasons to explain the outcome of the first stage of the formal complaints process?
4. If new evidence has been provided, has the complainant provided valid reasons for not submitting it earlier?

The Assistant Principal: Student Engagement or nominated person will review the formal complaint process and respond to the complainant within 10 working days of the request for review being submitted.

The outcome available from the review of a complaint stage is:

1. The outcome from the formal stage was appropriate and so upheld.
2. There may be grounds for the outcome from the formal stage to be reconsidered and the complaint is referred back to the formal stage.

5.2 Referring a Complaint back to the Formal Complaints Stage

If a complaint, following review, is referred back to the formal complaints stage, the complaint will be investigated and considered by an appropriate manager who has not been involved with the complaint previously. The process outlined in section 4.2 will be followed.

The outcome of the complaint will be:

1. The complaint is upheld either wholly or partially
2. The complaint is not upheld

Once the formal stage has been completed, complainants will be issued with a completion of procedures notification and the reasons for the outcome decision. This will end the complaints process and no further review will be undertaken of the complaint.

6.0 Following the Formal Outcome

The College expects that this complaints procedure, will satisfactorily resolve any issues or concerns, but recognises that a complainant may wish to continue the process if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome from the Review stage or following referral for reconsideration at the Formal stage.

In these circumstances the College is committed to providing clear and impartial advice as to the most appropriate external agency or department that any further complaint should be directed towards. Details will be provided on the 'Completion of procedures' letter sent to you following completion of the complaints process.

7.0 Additional Information for Higher Education Students

Higher Education compliments, suggestions and complaints will follow the general procedures outlined in sections 1 to 6 above. The College may issue a completion of procedures letter to higher education students at any stage in section 1 to 6 if a complaint or request for review is not made within the time limit stated in this procedure. There are two further stages for complaints for higher education students, appeals to an awarding body and complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator outlined below.

7.1 Appealing to an Awarding Body

If a higher education student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint following the stage 3 review or referral process, a student may wish to appeal to their Awarding Body, this is the organisation or university that is responsible for conferring achievement of a student's qualification.

7.2 Complaining to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator

Once the College's complaints and appeals processes have been completed, higher education students will receive a completion of proceedings letter and may be able to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The OIA is an independent body set up to review student complaints about higher education providers in England and Wales. Complaints to the OIA must be made within 12 months of the date of the completion of procedures letter.

The Office for the Independent Adjudicator will review complaints regarding a range of issues such as academic appeals, disciplinary matters, fitness to practice and procedural irregularities. The OIA cannot look at admissions, academic judgement, student employment or anything that has already been the subject of legal proceedings or considered by an alternative dispute resolution body. More details can be found at <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>



