

SOUTH & CITY COLLEGE BIRMINGHAM

COMPLAINTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

POLICY

1 Introduction

1.1 At South and City College, we are committed to providing high quality services for all our college community. Taking account of stakeholders' views enables us to promote and develop capacity for sustainable improvement. We therefore actively encourage feedback from our stakeholders, so we can identify areas of good practice but also those where we have fallen short of our high standards.

1.2 The objective of this policy is to provide:

- A swift, open process, which is fair to all parties
- A procedure designed to resolve problems quickly
- A thorough investigation into the complaints received
- Improvements to services for students and the quality of provision by acting on feedback and the recommendations made following investigations
- Accurate recording, monitoring and reporting of complaints

1.3 The Policy uses the following definitions:

- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about standards of service
- A compliment is an expression of praise concerning a service received
- A suggestion is a comment on how our service can be improved

1.4 All complaints and suggestions will be received positively and used to improve the quality of our service. Complainants will not be treated less favourable because they have made a complaint.

2 Scope

2.1 A complainant may be a student, prospective student, parent/guardian (where a student is under the age of 18 or aged under 25 with an Educational and Health Care Plan), employer or any other interested party which indicates dissatisfaction with the current level of service.

2.2 Students may submit a 'group complaint'. Where a complaint is made by a number of students, the College may ask the group to nominate one student to ask as a group representative.

- 2.3 If a complaint is made on behalf of another party, in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018, South and City College Birmingham will not discuss matters with third parties, unless the party has consented to this. It will instead, where possible, 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.
- 2.4 The College will ask for equality and diversity information of the complainant to help ensure that all people are treated fairly. Responses are not mandatory but are encouraged.
- 2.5 This policy does not cover complaints and appeals for the following concerns.
- Safeguarding – please refer to the Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
 - Student disciplinary intervention – please refer to the Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
 - Appeals against assessment and internal / external quality assurance – please refer to the Assessment Malpractice and Maladministration Policy
 - Bursary decisions – Please refer to the Student Bursary & Financial Support Policy
 - Recruitment outcomes – Please refer to Recruitment & Selection Code of Practice.
 - Academic appeals – please refer to the relevant academic appeals procedure which applies to your studies.
- 2.6 The College may not be able to investigate anonymous complaints. However, this depends on the amount of information provided by the complainant.
- 2.7 If a complainant is a college employee, they should refer to the college Grievance procedure or the Public Interest Disclosure Policy, in circumstances where there are legitimate concerns of malpractice within the College, which cannot be dealt with by any other procedure.
- 2.8 If a staff member is experiencing difficulties associated with a complaint, the primary support should be provided by their line manager. If necessary, the manager should consult with the Human Resources department to identify other sources of support, or if further investigation is necessary, in accordance with relevant HR policies and procedures.
- 2.9 The College reserves the right not to pursue any malicious, habitual, vexatious or abusive complaints. Complainants should be aware that our staff have the right to work in a pleasant and safe environment and that any violent or abusive behaviour will not be tolerated.

3 Responsibility

- 3.1 Complaints and compliments are monitored and administered centrally. Operational responsibility for this procedure lies with the Customer Services Manager, supported by the Student Services Administrator. Overall responsibility for this policy lies with the Senior Executive Director, Student Engagement & Workforce Development.

3.2 The investigation is normally conducted by the relevant departmental director or manager. Where the complaint is against more than one service/issue, the investigation manager will be assigned by the Senior Executive Director, Student Engagement & Workforce Development or another member of the Senior Management Team.

3.3 All staff have a responsibility to try and resolve complaints informally and forward any formal complaints to the Student Services Administrator, should customers remain dissatisfied.

4 Timescales

4.1 Complaints must be raised within 3 months of the original incident so that evidence is available for the investigation. Complaints that are submitted more than 3 months after the event in question will not be accepted unless there are exceptional extenuating circumstances that indicate that the time limit should not apply.

4.2 The College will investigate all complaints thoroughly and objectively. The Customer Services Manager will monitor the progress of the investigation.

4.3 Records relating to complaints will be retained for six years.

5 Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

5.1 The College will monitor trends from complaints received to improve and develop its services.

5.2 A termly report on complaints is produced and shared with the Senior Leadership Team. In addition, complaints are included in the annual Student Feedback Report to the Board of Governors.

Procedure

This procedure should be followed to communicate any concerns about the College, so we can support you in achieving a satisfactory solution to your complaint and respond appropriately.

Compliments and Suggestions

Compliments received by the College will be passed on to the individual or individuals who are the subject of the compliment, with the Student Services Administrator maintaining a central record. The College will use compliments to motivate staff and, where appropriate, support the promotion of College's activities.

Suggestions received by the College will be passed on to the relevant team for consideration. Any suggestion received will be given due consideration and a record will be kept regarding whether or not the suggestion was implemented. If the person making a suggestion has provided the college with their correspondence details, the relevant team

will contact them to let them know if their suggestion has been implemented. The complaints administrator will maintain a central record.

Complaints

Stage 1 – early resolution

Most complaints or concerns can be resolved informally and at an early stage. Complaints or concerns should be directed to an appropriate person as soon as possible after the incident occurring. Concerns can be raised with any member of staff (e.g. receptionist, tutor), who will help identify the most appropriate person to discuss it with.

It should be noted that a written record or response to issues raised at this early stage would not normally be made if both parties feel satisfied with the outcome.

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.

Formal complaints should normally be made in writing and a complaint form is available to help you do this, which can be collected from customer services team, student engagement team or downloaded from Attain or the College website. Complaints can also be made by email to feedback@sccb.ac.uk or by letter to:

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

Where a complaint is made verbally, either in person or by phone, then the member or staff receiving the complaint will take sufficient information from the complainant and will email the customer services team to process the complaint. An email address or phone number of the complainant will be needed in order to respond to the complaint.

Complainants should provide current contact information together with all supporting information regarding the complaint eg 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.

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

A formal response will be sent to a complainant within fifteen working days of the incident occurring. However, some complex complaints may take longer to investigate. In these exceptional cases, the college will contact the complainant to advise them of the timescales for resolution.

Stage 3 – Review of a Complaint (Appeal)

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your formal complaint (Stage 2), you may appeal against the decision within ten working days of our response. If we do not receive an appeal during this period, your complaint will be closed and if you are a Higher Education student, you will receive a completion of procedures letter. This will conclude the complaints process and access to the confidential file will be restricted.

Anyone who wishes to request a review must write to the Senior Executive Director, Student Engagement & Workforce Development within ten working days of the date of the complaint response letter to the above address/email. Your appeal will be acknowledged within three working days of submission.

The request for review should outline:

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

Senior Executive Director, Student Engagement & Workforce Development (or nominee) will consider the request for review and 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. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to refer the review back to the formal complaint stage based on, for example, new evidence.

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.

We will aim to resolve your appeal within ten working days of the appeal acknowledgement, however, some appeals may take longer. Where possible, we will advise you of an appropriate timescale for a resolution. A formal response will be sent to the complainant with an outcome of their appeal resolution.

The outcome of the appeal concludes the internal complaints and appeals process.

Formal Complaints – External Resolution

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 Appeal stage or following referral for reconsideration at the Formal stage.

If your complaint relates to a further education course funded by the **Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)** and **stages 1-3 have been fully exhausted**, you can contact the ESFA. Further details about the complaints policy are available on the link below: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>

Higher Education Students

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.

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.

Complaining to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator

Once the College's complaints and review 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>

Complaints Flow Chart

