



Complaints, Comments & Compliments Procedure

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Approved by Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

Strategy/Policy Responsibility: SLT

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Complaints, Comments & Compliments Procedure

1. Forward

Sutton College's handling procedure reflects the College's commitment to valuing complaints. It seeks to resolve learner dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and to conduct thorough and fair investigations of customer complaints. This procedure aims to help us 'get it right first time'.

Complaints give us valuable information which can be used to improve customer satisfaction. Our complaints handling procedure will enable us to address learner dissatisfaction and may also prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again. For our staff, complaints provide a first-hand account of the learner's views and experience and can highlight problems we may otherwise miss. Handled well, complaints can give our customers a form of redress when things go wrong and can also help us continuously improve our services.

Resolving complaints creates better customer relations. Sorting them out as close to the point of service delivery as possible means we can deal with them quickly, so they are less likely to escalate to the next stage of the procedure.

2. Guiding principals

- We will use feedback from our customers to drive improvements in the way we operate and welcome both negative and positive comments.
- We will always analyse feedback and have due regard to any relevant characteristic, such as disability, age or personal details and working with our customers to find solutions or new ways of working.
- We will respond in a quick and effective manner putting our learners' first.

3. Introduction

This procedure outlines how Sutton College will deal with any complaints, comments and compliments from learners, members of the public and stakeholders.

Sutton College aims for the highest standards of customer service and learner experience, and we work to ensure we manage all CCF efficiently and effectively.

Receiving feedback from people using our services, gives us the opportunity to resolve any issue raised and improve the quality of our service.

4. Scope

This procedure will be used for all complaints made by learners, parents/carers and members of the public. A complaint can also be made by:

- a representative acting on behalf of a child

- a representative acting on behalf of someone who is unable to make the complaint themselves because of physical or mental incapacity
- a representative where they have been asked to act on behalf of a learner
- a representative acting on behalf of someone who has died

Contact details of the complainants will be required to effectively investigate the complaint. The Complaints, Comments and Compliments procedure can also be informed by the Learners Survey. This procedure will not be used for internal complaints from staff. For this matter, please refer to the HR Policies available on the staff intranet.

5. Our aim

Through the use of our procedure, we aim to:

- Provide a simple and transparent process
- Resolve a learner's dissatisfaction at the earliest opportunity
- Advise learners of the standard of service they should expect, a time limit for replying to their complaint and their right to appeal
- Ensure a mechanism for recording and reporting complaints received so that we can monitor trends and use them as a tool for improving the quality of services provided
- To learn from complaints to improve the service we provide

6. Complaints

6.1 What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about a standard of service (whether justified or not) which requires a response. A complaint could be in relation to any of the following examples:

- There has been a misrepresentation on one of our courses
- We have failed to deliver a service
- Our processes or procedure have not been followed
- Our staff have been rude, unhelpful, or not conducted themselves correctly

**This is not an exhaustive list.*

6.2 A complaint is not:

- A routine first-time request for a service
- A request for compensation only
- An attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision

6.3 Handling anonymous complaints

We value all complaints. This means we treat all complaints, including anonymous complaints, seriously and will take action to consider them further, wherever this is

appropriate. Generally, we will consider anonymous complaints if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquiries. If, however, an anonymous complaint does not provide enough information to enable us to take further action, we may decide not to pursue it further. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by a senior manager within the department the complaint refers to.

If an anonymous complaint makes serious allegations, we will refer it to a senior manager immediately.

If the College pursues an anonymous complaint further, we will record the issues as an anonymous complaint on the customer feedback recording system. This will help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data we record and allow us to take corrective action where appropriate. However, anonymous complainants may find the whistleblowing procedure more appropriate.

6.4 The College has a range of other procedures which may be more appropriate to use:

- Safeguarding
- Staff Complaints – covered by the Grievance Procedure
- Allegations of malpractice – covered by the Whistleblowing Policy and the Anti-Bribery, Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy within the Financial Regulations

6.5. The procedure aims to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved.

6.6. No complainant bringing a complaint under this procedure will be treated less favourably by any member of staff. If there is evidence to the contrary, the member of staff may be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

6.7 If a complaint is considered to be vexatious or frivolous then the complaint will be referred to the senior manager or nominee for review and a response to the learner or learners concerned. In addition, if the language used in the complaint is in breach of the Learner Code of Conduct, disciplinary proceedings may be brought against the complainant.

A frivolous or vexatious complaint can be characterised in a number of ways including, but not limited to, the following:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
- Insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
- Insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value

7. Responsibility of the College

The College will:

- Acknowledge all formal complaints and aim to respond within a stated period of time
- Deal reasonably and sensitively with all complaints
- Take action where appropriate
- Welcome issues being brought to its attention to enable it to improve

8. Responsibility of the Complainant

The Complainant will be expected to:

- Bring their complaint to the College's attention within 6 weeks of the reason for the complaint occurring
- Explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date
- Allow the College reasonable time to deal with the matter
- Recognise that some circumstances may be beyond the College's control

9. Stage 1

9.1 The complainant should raise their concerns with the member of staff who has direct responsibility for the matter in question to try to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

9.2. If the complainant does not feel that their concerns have been addressed by the member of staff with direct responsibility, then they should make a formal complaint to the Principal's Office via the Your Voice system. (Stage 2).

10. Stage 2

10.1 On receipt of a formal complaint, the Director of Executive & Corporate Operations (DECO) will log the complaint and acknowledge its receipt within 3 working days.

102. Within 21 working days of receiving a complaint the Principal and/or the delegated investigating manager will provide the results of the investigation and a letter or email of reply for the complainant detailing the outcome and actions arising from the investigation.

103. In cases where the investigating manager is unable to meet the above timescale, the investigating manager will inform the Principal who, in turn, will communicate this to the complainant. (See no. 11 below).

11. Extension to the timeline

Not all reviews will be able to meet this deadline. For example, some complaints require careful consideration and detailed review beyond the 21 working day limit. However, these would be the exception and the response to a complaint within 21 working days must be adhered to where possible.

If there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescales, a reasonable

extension to be agreed with the customer. The customer must be kept updated on the reason for the delay and given a revised timetable for completion. If the customer does not agree to an extension, but it is unavoidable and reasonable, then senior management must consider and confirm the extension.

12. Appeals

The complainant has the right of appeal against the response to his/her complaint. The appeal may only be made on one or more of the following grounds:

- That there is additional evidence that could not have been made available at the time the original complaint was considered
- Proper procedures were not followed

13. Procedure

The complainant should make their appeal by writing to the Principal's office within 15 days of the date of the letter. This letter of appeal should clearly state the grounds for appeal (see above).

14. The Principal will ask a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to conduct the appeal. We aim to provide the record of the decision within 10 working days, although this may not always be possible especially during the holiday periods when the College could be closed or there is reduced staff due to annual leave. In these instances, this will be explained in writing to the complainant. There is no further right of appeal within the College's procedures. Greater London Authority (GLA) funded learners can escalate their complaint to the GLA at Skillscomplaints@london.gov.uk if they are unsatisfied after the final outcome.

15. Monitoring and Reporting

- 11.1. The Director of Executive & Corporate Operations (DECO) will oversee the tracking and monitoring of complaints progressed through the procedure.
- 11.2. The Complaints Procedure is one aspect of the College's quality assurance procedures; therefore termly reporting will be sent to the Senior Leadership Team and used to facilitate improvements to services and facilities.
- 11.3. The Board of Governors also receive a summary of complaints on a termly basis as part of its oversight role and responsibility for Quality.

16. Complaints resolution

The College aims to resolve complaints by putting things right where there has been a failure. Our approach will be fair and consistent across all the complaints we uphold. Where the College is at fault, we will provide appropriate redress by:

- Apologising for the failure
- Explaining what went wrong
- Saying what we have done to put things right
- Where appropriate, say how we have learned from the complaint

Where our service has met our standards and the complaint is not upheld, we will:

- Thank the customer for providing their feedback
- Explain why the complaint was not upheld
- Where appropriate, say how we have learned from their feedback

17. Comments and Compliments

The College is committed to providing high quality services. We are always looking for ideas on how to improve things and recognising when we have done things well.

Comments and compliments are another form of customer feedback which provides an opportunity for identifying service areas strengths and weaknesses for the College to learn and develop from this. There are various ways for learners to communicate positive feedback which could be via the learner survey, the yourvoice@suttoncollege.ac.uk mailbox or alternatively, learners could write a letter.

Comments and compliments are recorded on the College's customer feedback recording system and fed back to the relevant departments. This information is also passed to the Senior Leadership Team for review.