

Complaints Procedure

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 West Nottinghamshire College prides itself on delivering first class customer service at all times. The delivery of an outstanding customer experience is a key tenant of its strategic objective and organisational values.
- 1.2 However, the college also recognises that sometimes things may not meet these high standards. It actively encourages feedback from a range of service users and will be open and transparent in its resolution of complaints and in learning lessons from them.
- 1.3 This procedure aims to ensure that complaints are resolved promptly and fairly. The procedure covers all areas of college activity. The procedure can therefore be used by any student, apprentice, parent, employers, member of staff, visitor, contractor or member of the local community who has reason to be unhappy with the service provided by the college.
- 1.4 The procedure covers complaints in whatever form they are received, we encourage feedback both positive and negative through a range of channels including – through reception points at major campuses (where appropriate forms are available), over the telephone, in person with a specific member of staff, via the contact us button on the college’s website and via social media channels. In whatever form complaints are received, the principles of this procedure shall still apply.
- 1.5 We strongly believe that most issues can be resolved quickly and at the informal stage of our process. However, for more serious incidents or incidents where the informal stage has not been able to resolve matters there are two further more formal stages to the complaints process and then recourse for individuals to take their complaint to external bodies who have oversight of the quality and funding for all aspects of the college’s provision.

2.0 Stage 1 – Informal resolution

- 2.1 Many issues or complaints can be resolved quickly through this stage of the procedure and where possible it is often best to do so. Matters at the informal stage can be best dealt with by the appropriate member of staff (e.g. tutor, curriculum manager or member of support staff).
- 2.2 All staff within college are empowered to resolve issues to the satisfaction of both parties and may seek the advice of more senior members of staff to do so. Feedback and resolution to issues raised may be immediate in some cases, however it may be necessary for the

member of staff to gather more information before concluding; as such it is expected that informal complaints will be resolved within 5 working days.

- 2.3 In many cases the outcome of an informal complaint will be communicated verbally. The college does not require written confirmation of outcome unless this is specifically requested by the complainant.
- 2.4 As informal complaints or suggestions for improvement are dealt with as part of our routine business there is no need for these issues to be logged with the customer enquiries team unless the member of staff dealing with the issue feels that this would add value to the college's quality improvement mechanisms.

3.0 Stage 2 – Formal complaint

- 3.1 If resolution cannot be found at the informal stage or matters are too significant for the informal approach to be appropriate individuals may wish to make a formal complaint.
- 3.2 A formal complaint must be made within three months of the issue first arising and must be made in writing to:

The Customer Enquiries Team Leader, West Nottinghamshire College, Derby Road, Mansfield, NG18 5BH. Or via the complaints form available on the college's website.

Paper-based formal complaints forms are also available from reception points at each of the college's sites.

Alternatively formal complaints can be provided over the telephone by calling the college's main switchboard number – 01623 627191.

- 3.3 The college will take action on anonymous complaints in exceptional circumstances and where it felt that matters are significant and serious enough to warrant investigation without knowing the details of the complainant.
- 3.4 The team leader will acknowledge receipt of the formal complaint within two working days from receipt of the formal complaint.
- 3.5 An investigating officer, usually a manager from within the team subject to the complaint will be identified by the team leader. In particularly serious matters a member of the college's Executive team (with the exception of the Vice Principal: Communications, Engagement and Student Experience) may be asked to act as investigating officer.
- 3.6 All complaints made to the Principal of the college directly will be logged as per the procedure above with an investigating officer appointed as per points 3.5 above.
- 3.7 Upon receipt of the complaint, the investigating officer will consider the issues raised by the complaint and may contact the complainant to gather further information. In addition, the investigating officer may contact other members of staff or interview other individuals in conducting their investigation. They will respond in writing to the complainant within ten

working days. Their response will summarise their findings, propose a resolution if appropriate and/or state whether their investigation has upheld the issues raised by the complainant. A copy of the response will be provided to the Team Leader for the Customer Enquiries team for logging in the central complaints database.

- 3.8 In certain circumstances, the deadlines stated above may need to be extended to enable a thorough and proper investigation to be conducted. This may be of particular relevance out of college term time to allow for key staff to be available as part of the investigation. If such an extension is necessary this will be communicated to the complainant in writing.

4.0 Stage 3 – Internal Appeal

- 4.1 In most cases complaints can be resolved within stage two. However, it may be that the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution proposed or outcome of the complaint. In these instances individuals have the right to appeal.

- 4.2 Appeals should be made in writing to the Vice Principal: Communications, Engagement and Student Experience and should be made within ten working days from the receipt of the original response letter.

- 4.3 The Vice Principal will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within two working days. The Vice Principal will then consider the original investigation, any evidence that was not considered as part of the original complaint and the reasonableness of the proposed resolution. She will determine whether the appeal has grounds and will respond in writing within ten working days from the date of receipt.

- 4.4 The response made by the Vice Principal will outline whether the appeal has been upheld in full, partially or not at all and may suggest an alternative resolution to that proposed in the original response.

- 4.5 In certain circumstances, the deadlines stated above may need to be extended to enable a thorough and proper investigation to be conducted. This may be of particular relevance out of college term time to allow for key staff to be available as part of the investigation. If such an extension is necessary this will be communicated to the complainant in writing.

- 4.6 The decision of the Vice Principal is final and as such internal procedures for complaints are deemed to have been exhausted at this stage. For HE students, the written notification of appeal will also represent a formal 'Completion of Procedures'. In all instances information about how the complainant can seek external review of matters will be provided.

5.0 Continuing a complaint beyond college

- 5.1 The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. West Nottinghamshire College is a member of this scheme. If you are unhappy with the outcome you may be able to ask the OIA to review your appeal. You can find more information about making a complaint to the OIA, what it can and can't look at and what it can do to put things right here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>.

You normally need to have completed the complaints process, including appeal, before you complain to the OIA. We will send you a letter called a “Completion of Procedures Letter” when you have reached the end of our processes and there are no further steps you can take internally. If your appeal is upheld or partly upheld you can ask for a Completion of Procedures Letter if you want one. You can find more information about Completion of Procedures Letters and when you should expect to receive one here:

<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters>.

- 5.2 For all non-HE related issues, individuals have the right to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>
- 5.3 Issues related to the award of qualifications, conduct within examinations or grading can be referred to the relevant awarding body for investigation. Details of the correct awarding body for the programme of study can be obtained from the college’s exams team.
- 5.4 Both agencies will want to satisfy themselves that the internal complaints processes of the college have been exhausted prior to acting upon complaints.
- 6.0 Complaints about a senior post-holder or concerns about potentially fraudulent, corrupt or irregular activity**
- 6.1 The college has a separate Whistleblowing Policy which covers complaints against a senior post-holder or concerns about potentially fraudulent, corrupt or irregular activity. These are dealt with via the college’s Whistleblowing Procedure and dealt with via the Clerk to the Corporation. A copy can be provided on request.
- 6.2 Current senior post-holders within the college are the Principal, Vice Principals and the Director of Finance.