

Complaints Procedure

A complaint is an expression of concern or dissatisfaction with the services provided or actions taken by the college. This procedure applies to all students, Apprentices, parents or carers, salon or restaurant clients and employers (not contracted to the College). Where a contract exists between the College and another party, the terms of the contract will apply following the informal stage. Complaints should be handled in a professional non-confrontational manner.

1. Informal Approach to resolving complaints

- 1.1. Talk through the issue with the appropriate member of staff to find an informal way to resolve the problem, within 10 working days of the action or loss of service that you feel has adversely impacted on you.
- 1.2. Examples of appropriate members of staff:
 - a. Personal Development Tutor / Student Progress and Development Manager
 - b. Subject Lecturer / Trainer Assessor / Skills Coaches / Work-based Learning Manager
 - c. Head of Student Registry and Data
 - d. Welfare Co-ordinator
 - e. Learning Centre Co-ordinator
 - f. Facilities Administrator
 - g. Head of Examinations
 - h. Front of House Officer
 - i. Salon Manager
 - j. Restaurant Manager
 - k. Business Executive or Development Manager – for employer complaints
 - l. Where a contract with the College exists, the named person in the contract.

They can be contacted through reception or by ringing the switchboard. The member of staff contacted will normally respond within 2 working days and will inform the nominated Quality complaints administrator of the informal complaint and their response to it.

2. Formal Approach

- 2.1. If the informal approach does not resolve the matter, you may make a formal complaint, which should be in writing, using the complaints form attached and addressed to the Director of Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Sunderland College / Hartlepool Sixth Form or the Director of Education and Training for Northumberland College. Alternative formats and methods of complaints will be accepted, but if you have not followed the informal approach the College reserves the right to instigate this and treat your complaint informally in the first instance. Assistance regarding how to make a complaint or any support required by students during an investigation can be accessed through our reception or student services.
- 2.2. A formal complaint must be made within 15 working days of the action or loss of service that you feel has adversely affected the quality of your learning opportunity / service.

- 2.3. The Director of Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment or Director of Education and Training will assign an investigating manager and release information to enable the investigation to go ahead, typically to:
- a. Head of Department
 - b. Director / Head of Academy
 - c. Associate Principal
 - d. Alternative manager
 - e. Senior Commercial Manager
 - f. HR Partner (for complaints directly relating to the behaviours of a staff member)

Confidentiality and anonymity are assured as appropriate, with information only released to those who are investigating or responding to the investigation.

On receipt of a formal, written complaint:

Within 2 working days The Director of Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment or Director of Education and Training will acknowledge receipt of the formal complaint to the complainant (and forward a copy to the assigned investigating manager).

Within 10 working days The investigator will conclude the investigation and send the College's detailed response to the complainant. If it is not possible to conclude within 10 days the investigator will send the complainant an indication of how the complaint is being addressed and when they will receive a detailed response.

Copies of all correspondence relating to the complaint should be forwarded to the nominated Quality complaints administrator to inform the central complaints record.

3. Appeal against the outcome of a formal written complaint

3.1. If the complainant is not satisfied with the substantive response to their complaint they have the option to make an Appeal. If they wish to do this they should write to the Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (Group) (all complainants except Apprentices and employers), or the Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial (Group) for Apprentices and employers, stating that they are unhappy with the outcome, outlining the reasons for appeal and what they will consider as an alternative outcome. This should be done within 30 days of the formal written response being sent to the complainant.

3.2. The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (Group)/ Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial (Group), or their appointed representative will then review the complaint, including any investigation to date. However, if the complaint is against the Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (Group)/ Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial (Group), the appeal should be sent to the Interim Deputy Principal (Sunderland College / Hartlepool Sixth Form) or Principal (Northumberland College).

3.3. They may also carry out further investigations on the complainant's behalf. In any event, they will seek to resolve the issues involved and issue a written response within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal letter.

4. Taking a Complaint Further

4.1. If you are a higher education student on a course franchised to the College by a university, you may wish to take your complaint to the university if you are not satisfied with our response.

4.2. If, when the internal formal complaints procedure has been exhausted, the complainant remains dissatisfied they may have grounds to complain to the relevant Awarding Organisation or the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), or Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). **

** The OIA can be contacted via the Associate Principal – Adults & HE.

Awarding Organisations can be contacted via the Director of Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment (Sunderland College / Hartlepool Sixth Form or the Director of Education and Training (Northumberland).

5. Time Periods

5.1. The time periods as set out in this procedure are for guidance and may be subject to extension, particularly outside academic terms. Where any such extensions are made, they will be notified to the complainant in writing. Where there is a formal contract, the timescales will be in accordance with the contract.

6. Complaints relating to Governance

6.1. Any governance complaints should be addressed to the Head of Corporate Governance and Policy.

7. Complaints that are frivolous or vexatious

7.1 If a complaint is considered to be frivolous or vexatious, it may be rejected by the College. If this is the case, the Director of Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment (Sunderland College / Hartlepool Sixth Form), or Director of Education and Training (Northumberland), will write to the complainant within 10 working days of the rejection, outlining the reasons for rejecting the complaint.

7.2 Student / Apprentice complaints that are found to be vexatious may result in disciplinary action.

8. Monitoring and Reporting

8.1. The Director of Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment / Education and Training will ensure that adequate records are maintained of the complaints handling process.

8.2. The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (Group) will produce an annual report of complaints received to include the outcome of investigation, lessons learned and actions taken. The annual report will be submitted to the Regional Board of the Corporation.

9. Review of Procedure

9.1. This procedure will be reviewed annually by the Board of the Corporation.

Formal Complaint

Please complete this form and return to the Director of Quality, Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Sunderland College / Hartlepool Sixth Form or the Director of Education and Training at Northumberland College.

Name of person complaining:	Date making the complaint:
Stage 1: Informal Complaint	
<p>1. Have you talked through the issue with a member of staff? If 'yes', and you are not satisfied with the outcome, then complete this form (if you need support, then please ask a member of staff). If 'no', then please talk through the issue with a member of staff first. We would hope to resolve your issue at this point.</p>	
Stage 2: Formal Complaint	
<p>1. What is the reason for the complaint? What is the action or loss of service that has adversely impacted on you?</p>	
<p>2. When did this happen?</p>	
<p>3. Who was involved?</p>	
<p>4. What do you hope the outcome will be?</p>	
Signed:	Date: