



Complaints Policy

2023-25

This policy outlines United Colleges Group's approach to informal and formal complaints, made by students/ visitors/customers/stakeholders (the 'complainant') and includes investigation procedures, response timelines, and appeals processes for both the College of North West London and City of Westminster College.

Document Status	
Owner	Head of Performance and Quality
Author	Head of Performance and Quality
Date of Origin	March 2022
Colleges covered	United Colleges Group
Version	V4
Date of Approval	November 2023
Date of Next Review	06 April 2024
Approval Body	UCG Corporation

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Aims

- 1.1 To ensure all complaints and appeals are taken seriously. In the context of this policy:
- a 'complaint' is any issue brought to the attention of the College, which the person, 'the complainant' (a current/former FE or HE student/a College applicant/a member of visitor/customer) feels is unsatisfactory or is unacceptable;
 - an 'appeal' is an application made initially to the appropriate Deputy Principal, then upon further escalation, to the Chair of Governors by a complainant for any Outcome, arising from an investigation into the complaint, to be reconsidered/reversed.
- 1.2 To provide a framework for the way complaints are processed and resolved, according to agreed procedures.
- 1.3 To ensure the accompanying processes/procedures are reviewed/amended if not annually, then no later than the review date of the policy.
- 1.4 To ensure the accompanying processes/procedures comply with current legislation.
- 1.5 To eliminate, as far as possible, the nature arising from complaints, so that similar complaints do not arise subsequently.

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1 The College is committed to continuous improvement in all aspects of its work. This *Complaints Policy* supports that commitment: complaints will be taken seriously and every effort will be made to eliminate the nature of complaints.

3. Delivery of this Policy

3.1 Responsibilities/Policy Ownership/Communication

The Performance and Quality team are responsible for:

- ensuring there are processes/procedures in place to deal with complaints, as well as any subsequent appeals, made to the Deputy Principals and, upon further escalation, to the Chair of Governors.
- ensuring all complaints and appeals are dealt with according to the agreed procedures once a complaint has been lodged with the College.
- ensuring all formal complaints are processed within a specific time period.
- ensuring a complainant is informed of:
 - the procedures and processes for both informal and formal complaints;
 - the outcome of an investigation into a complaint;
 - the 'next steps' a complainant may take, including the complainant's right of appeal, if it is felt a complaint is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction
 - ensuring the process, procedures and paperwork for lodging a complaint, appended to the policy, are reviewed and amended on an annual basis or no later than the review date of the policy.
 - communicating the policy to the College community via the College portal and for ensuring the policy is available via the College website.

3.2 The Deputy Principals and the College's Chair of Governors are responsible for:

- the process for appeals.
- informing a complainant of the final stages of the complaint process:
 - if, following an appeal, the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may complain to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA): Further Education; Office of Independent Adjudicators (OIA): Higher Education.
 - if the complainant still remains dissatisfied that their complaint has not been resolved to their satisfaction, they may complain to the Secretary of State for Education.

3.3 Other Related Policies

Other documents which should be read in conjunction with this Complaints Policy and which may override what the policy covers are:

- The College's: 'UCG Assessment Policy and Guidelines', which outline student and staff responsibilities, and the process students should follow if they wish to appeal against a grade/mark awarded by an assessor.
- The College's formal Staff Disciplinary Policy
- The College's Staff 'Grievance Policy'.
- The Colleges' Student Learning and Behavior policy
- The colleges Disciplinary Policy
- The Colleges Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- The colleges Safeguarding and Prevent Policy

3.4 Policy Development

- This policy is based on good practice in the sector and will be updated when required
- Feedback from policy users is sought, regarding the development/ revisions to the policy and the accompanying appendices, all of which are reviewed annually or no later than the review date of the policy.

3.5 Policy Location

- The Policy is available on the College portal and College website and all students will be made aware of the Policy and process at induction. The policy can be found under the Policy section of UCG Website, which can be found here

APPENDICES

Procedures for dealing with complaints received by the College:

APPENDIX 1	Procedure for dealing with informal complaints made by College students or stakeholders to the College
APPENDIX 2	Procedure for dealing with formal written complaints to the College during term-time
APPENDIX 3	Procedure for dealing with formal written complaints to the College outside term-time
APPENDIX 4	Process and Procedures for different complaint types (formal complaints)
APPENDIX 5	Responsibilities of Investigation Manager
APPENDIX 6	Appeals Process
APPENDIX 7	Customer Complaint Form

APPENDIX 1

Procedure for dealing with informal complaints made by College students or stakeholders to the College

A first principle is to ensure that early intervention and response by all staff will address customer dissatisfaction before issues become formal complaints. For example, student complains about their course, this should be discussed firstly with their lecturer or group tutor where appropriate. If the issue is not resolved, it should then be discussed with the Curriculum Manager / Assistant Principal. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, the complaint should then be put in writing (by completing the Formal Complaints online form) which will initiate the formal phase of the complaint to be investigated.

Please note:

- Except in exceptional circumstances:
 - Informal complaints may normally only be considered if the informal complaint is lodged no more than two calendar weeks after the event which is the subject of the informal complaint.
 - An informal complaint will not be considered if it is made anonymously.

In the case of an informal complaint against a member of staff, and depending on the seriousness of the complaint, i.e. the complaint falls under other College policies, e.g. 'Grievance Policy', 'Staff Disciplinary Policy', etc., the informal complaint may be referred directly to Human Resources for consideration. If Human Resources deem this complaint to be suitable for Human Resources investigation, the complainant will be contacted in writing by Human Resources. If Human Resources deem the complaint unsuitable for Human Resources investigation, the complaint will be referred to Performance and Quality for formal or informal resolution. In this case, Performance and Quality will notify the student as appropriate, and notify Human Resources of the outcome of any subsequent investigation. If at this stage Human Resources deem the complaint suitable for Human Resources investigation, the complainant will be contacted in writing by Human Resources, outside of the formal complaints process.

1. A student, who is currently enrolled may contact the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator either by telephone or in writing to Complaints@ucg.ac.uk and makes an informal complaint, a complainant can also make a complaint through service desk, at the first instance the complaints should be directed to the relevant Curriculum Area
2. The Senior Performance and Quality Administrator/ and or Service Desk will:
 - Notify the relevant Assistant Principal & Curriculum Manager or Head of Service Area of the informal complaint if they consider it to be one which should be investigated by the Curriculum/Service area in the first instance.
 - Notify the complainant of the names of staff the informal complaint has been forwarded to with the aim to resolve the issue informally.

N.B. If the complaint is submitted during term-time, the Assistant Principal/Head of Service will

arrange for the informal complaint to be investigated and will contact the complainant within 5 working days of the complaint being received by them. No complaint reference number will be allocated to this complaint. The Assistant Principal/Head of Service Area must notify the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator of the outcome of the informal complaint.

- If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation by the curriculum/service area, within 5 working days of being informed of the outcome, they must contact the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator and ask for a Formal Complaint Form/ In this case a reference number will be allocated to the complaint once the online Formal Complaint Form has been completed.
- or, if the complaint is made via the telephone the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator will ask the complainant to submit the complaint in writing to be dealt within the Curriculum Area.

3. For all 'formal' complaints:

- either, the 'Procedure for dealing with formal complaints received by the College during term-time' (Appendix 2) are followed.
- or, the 'Procedure for dealing with formal complaints received by the College outside term-time' (Appendix 3) are followed.

APPENDIX 2

Procedure for dealing with formal complaints received by the College during term-time

Please note:

- Complaints may normally only be considered if the complaint is lodged no more than two calendar weeks after the event which is the subject of the complaint, except in exceptional circumstances.
- Except in exceptional circumstances, a complaint will not be considered if it is made anonymously.

In the case of a complaint against a member of staff, and depending on the seriousness of the complaint, i.e. the complaint falls under other College policies, e.g. 'Grievance Policy', 'Staff Disciplinary Policy', etc., the complaint may be referred directly to Human Resources for consideration. If Human Resources deem this complaint to be suitable for Human Resources investigation, the complainant will be contacted in writing by Human Resources. If Human Resources deem the complaint unsuitable for Human Resources investigation, the complaint will be referred to Performance and Quality for formal resolution. In this case, Performance and Quality will notify the student as appropriate, and notify Human Resources of the outcome of the subsequent investigation. If at this stage Human Resources deem the complaint suitable for Human Resources investigation, the complainant will be contacted in writing by Human Resources, outside of the formal complaints process.

1. Once a formal written complaint is received by the Performance and Quality department:
 - It is assigned a reference number, category (see Appendix 4), and an Investigation Manager by the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator
 - it is acknowledged in writing by the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator within 3 working days;
 - The complainant is told the name of the Investigation Manager and the date by which the complainant will receive a response as to the outcome of the investigation into the complaint. This date will be 30 working days from receipt of the complaint by the Performance and Quality department.
2. The Senior Performance and Quality Administrator arranges for the complaint to be investigated.
3. The complainant will be contacted by the Investigation Manager, the member of staff responsible for investigating the complaint, who will summarise the complaint and will clarify if and where necessary as to what outcome(s) the complainant is seeking.
4. If the complaint raises any safeguarding concerns, the Head of Student Services will be notified of the complaint.
5. If the investigation is not completed within 15 working days, the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator will notify the complainant of the progress that has been made in dealing with the complaint, together with a

reminder notice of the deadline set for resolving the complaint. If at any point, the complaint falls under other College policies, e.g. 'Grievance Policy', 'Staff Disciplinary Policy', etc. the timescales set by this policy/process will be followed and the complainant will be informed.

6. Once the investigation is completed, the Quality Assurance Leader will write to the complainant, outlining the College's response. In the written response they will direct the complainant to 'Appendix 6: Appeals Process' and attach a copy of the college's Complaints Policy.

APPENDIX 3

Procedure for dealing with formal complaints received by the College outside term-time

Please note:

It is important to note that when a complaint is received outside term-time it will normally take longer to investigate and for a response to be made. This is because the staff required to investigate the complaint may not be available to do so. The Senior Performance and Quality Administrator will ensure the complainant is notified of this and this will be reflected in the date by which the complainant will receive any progress update and/or the outcome of the investigation into their complaint.

Other than the above, the standard procedure for deadline with formal complaints (Appendix 2) will be followed.

APPENDIX 4

Formal Complaints Categories

1. Complaint about the quality of service received
2. Complaint about the physical environment
3. Complaint about the behaviour of a member of staff
4. Complaint about the behaviour of a student by another student or a member of the public

Appendix 4.1: Complaint about the quality of service received

The majority of complaints fall under this category, which covers the quality of service provided to students throughout their journey with UCG, and the quality of service provided to stakeholders. This may include complaints regarding:

- Admissions
- Funding
- Enrolment
- Induction
- Additional Support
- Bursary
- Teaching, Learning, Assessment
- Academic
- Exams
- Learning Resources
- Tutorial/Pastoral Support
- Certification
- Commercial services

Appendix 4.2: Complaint about the physical environment

This category covers any complaints related to our campuses, facilities, and physical resources. This may include:

- Classrooms
- Workshops
- Laboratories
- Learning Resource Centres
- IT and hardware
- Canteens and cafes
- Social spaces
- Communal areas

Appendix 4.3: Complaint about the behaviour of a member of staff

This category includes any complaints made by students or stakeholders regarding the behaviour of any member of staff.

In the case of a complaint against a member of staff, and depending on the seriousness of the complaint, i.e. the complaint falls under other College policies, e.g. 'Grievance Policy', 'Staff Disciplinary Policy', etc., the complaint may be referred directly to Human Resources for consideration. If Human Resources deem this complaint to be suitable for Human Resources investigation, the complainant will be contacted in writing by Human Resources. If Human Resources deem the complaint unsuitable for Human Resources investigation, the complaint will be referred to Performance and Quality for formal resolution. In this case, Performance and Quality will notify the student as appropriate, and notify Human Resources of the outcome of the subsequent investigation. If at this stage Human Resources deem the complaint suitable for Human Resources investigation, the complainant will be contacted in writing by Human Resources, outside of the formal complaints process.

Appendix 4.4: Complaint about the behaviour of a student by another student or a member of the public

This category includes any complaints made by students, stakeholders, or members of the public regarding the behaviour of any other UCG student.

In the case of a complaint against a student, and depending upon the seriousness of the complaint, i.e. the complaint falls under the Learning and Behaviour Policy as Gross Misconduct, the complaint may be referred directly to the Assistant Principal and Curriculum Manager for the Curriculum Area in which the student is studying. If the Assistant Principal and Curriculum Manager deem the complaint suitable for investigation/suspension/exclusion under the Learning and Behaviour Policy, the standard disciplinary procedure will be followed. If the complaint does not fall under the Learning and Behaviour Policy as Gross Misconduct, or the Assistant Principal and Curriculum Manager do not deem the complaint suitable for investigation/suspension/exclusion under the Learning and Behaviour Policy, Performance and Quality will follow the formal complaints process.

APPENDIX 5

Responsibilities of Investigation Manager

- An Investigation Manager will be appointed to a formal complaint
- Investigation Manager is required to carry out an investigation into a complaint and is required to examine the complaint with impartiality and with respect to best practice in customer care.
- They are required to carry out the investigation fairly and objectively seeking opportunities to resolve rather than escalate the complaint.
- The Investigation Manager must provide a written report, they must not report their findings to the complainant or write to them other than as part of the investigation.
- Investigation Manager must report any delays to the investigation to the Performance and Quality Team.
- During the investigation of a complaint, appropriate confidentiality will be maintained and UCG will not share information relating to complaints unnecessarily. However, for students under 18 or vulnerable adults, where issues arise relating to the safeguarding agenda, UCG reserves the right to contact students' parents or legal guardians.
- Group complaints – cannot be lodged by one person acting on behalf of the group. Each complainant's signature needs to be submitted.
- The Investigation Manager will identify any documentation that would help the investigation e.g. class timetables, course information, course selection criteria, letters to students, disciplinary reports, witness statements etc. and carry out a review in relation to this evidence. Where a complainant or their representative is interviewed, minuted notes must be taken for the record.

Appendix 6: Appeals Process

1 Appeals to the Chief Executive Officer and Group Principal

- In the College Final Outcome Letter to a complainant sent by the Quality Assurance Leader via email, the complainant is informed that they have the right of appeal if they are not satisfied with the outcome.
- If the complainant decides to submit an appeal, they must:
 - Do so in writing (hard-copy or email), giving the relevant complaint reference number (e.g. C24-10) to which the appeal refers;
 - Do so within 10 working days of receiving the College response to their complaint;
 - Outline in detail the grounds for the appeal, i.e. the reasons why the complainant was not satisfied with the response to their complaint given to them. It is important to note that an appeal may only be considered if there is new or additional evidence or a procedural error has been made by the College when the complaint was investigated.
- Send the 'Letter of Appeal' to the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator, who:
 - Will acknowledge its receipt within 5 working days;
 - Will collate documentation relating to the original complaint, as well as new or additional evidence relating to the appeal to The Deputy Principals within further 5 working days
- The Deputy Principals will review the 'Letter of Appeal' and documentation within a further 10 working days. If an interview with the complainant is necessary during this time, the complainant making the appeal will be contacted by the Secretariat Team to arrange this, and has the right to be accompanied by one other person, e.g. a parent or friend, etc.
- Within a total of 20 working days from the acknowledgement of receipt of the initial 'Letter of Appeal', the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator will contact the complainant of The Deputy Principals outcome which will be:
- Outlining The Deputy Principals response to the appeal, i.e. either that the appeal has been upheld, outlining any action The Deputy Principals intends to take, or the appeal has not been upheld; informing the complainant that if they remain dissatisfied, they have the right to appeal to the Chair of the College's Governing Body.

2 Appeals to the Chair of the College's Governing Body

- If a complainant wishes to appeal to the Chair of the College's Governing Body, the complainant should write to the Chief Executive Officer and Group Principal's Secretariat Team within 10 working days of receiving The Deputy Principals

- response to the appeal, stating that they wish to make an appeal to the Chair of the College's Governing Body, outlining the grounds for the appeal, i.e. stating why the complainant was not satisfied with The Deputy Principals response to the appeal.
- Once a request for an appeal to the Chair of College's Governing Body has been received, the Chief Executive Officer and Group Principal's Secretariat Team will pass the request and all the paperwork etc. concerned with the original complaint to the Director of Governance, who will pass this to the Chair of Governors or the Chair's delegated representative.
- Within 20 working days of receiving the initial request for an appeal to the Chair of the College's Governing Body, and after having consulted with the Chair of the College's Governing Body or the Chair's delegated representative, the Director of Governance will contact the complainant, informing them of the decision of Chair of the College's Governing Body/the delegated representative, i.e. either that the appeal has been upheld, outlining any action the Chair of the College's Governing Body intends to take, or the appeal has not been upheld.
- Whatever the outcome of the appeal to the Chair of the College's Governing Body, if the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to complain to:
 - Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA): Further Education (FE Students): <https://www.gov.uk/complainfurthereducationapprenticeship>
 - Office of Independent Adjudicators (OIA): Higher Education (HE Students): www.oiahe.org.uk
- Following consideration by either of the above, if a complainant remains dissatisfied, a complaint may be made to the Secretary of State for Education.

Complaints Form

Use the link below to complete the online complaints form. Once the online form has been submitted this will be received by the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator arranges.

<https://ucg.ac.uk/policies/complaints-form>

