



# Complaints Policy 2023-25

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# COMPLAINTS POLICY

## 1. College Purpose, Strategic Aims and Values

### 1.1 Purpose

- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

### 1.2 Strategic Aims

- Provide an outstanding student experience aligned with high quality outcomes delivered in best class facilities for the digital age
- Be known for a people first culture that is inclusive, fair and responsive
- Ensure that the future of our college is secure through efficient and effective use of resources

### 1.3 Values

#### Our College believes in:

- Inclusion and belonging - We embrace diversity and take pro-active steps to be inclusive.
- Mutual trust and respect - We communicate openly and assume positive intent.
- Putting our students first - We put students first in everything we do.
- Always improving - We embrace a mindset of perpetual growth, seeking constant improvements in processes, education and personal development of peers and our students.
- Compassion and empathy – We care about each other, our wellbeing, our development and actively seek to understand and validate the feelings of others.

## 2. Policy Statement

United Colleges Group is committed to providing a learning environment where learners can achieve their goals and freely participate in college activities. Complaints are important to the college, as they assist with the continuous improvement in all aspects of our work. Complaints will be taken seriously and every effort will be made to address issues that are raised. 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.

The policy aims are as follows:

- To ensure all complaints and appeals are taken seriously.
- To provide a consistent framework for the way complaints are processed, investigated and resolved, according to agreed procedures.
- To ensure the complaints processes/procedures comply with current legislation.
- To use complaints as an opportunity to improve college services to its students and stakeholders.
- To address issues arising from complaints, so that similar complaints do not arise

subsequently.

- To ensure the accompanying processes/procedures are reviewed or amended no later than the review date of the policy.

### **3. Definitions**

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 parent, carer or guardian of a student or applicant or a visitor/customer) feels is unsatisfactory or is unacceptable;

An 'appeal' is an application made initially to the appropriate Vice Principal, then upon further escalation, to the Principal and then to the Chair of Governors or their nominee by a complainant for any outcome, arising from an investigation into the complaint, to be reconsidered/reversed.

### **4. Delivery of this Policy**

#### **4.1. 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 Vice Principals and, upon further escalation, to the Principal and then to the Chair of Governors or their nominee.
- 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.

The Vice Principals the Principal and the College's Chair of Governors or their nominee 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 escalate their complaint to the Awarding Organisation (if the complaint is related to a qualification or examination), Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA): for Further Education; Office of Independent Adjudicators (OIA): for Higher Education; or the relevant qualification regulator (if the complaint is related to a qualification or examination).
  - 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.

## **4.2. Other Related Policies**

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

- '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.
- UCG formal Staff Disciplinary Policy
- UCG Staff Grievance Policy.
- UCG Student Learning and Behavior policy
- UCG Disciplinary Policy
- UCG Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- UCG Safeguarding and Prevent Policy

## **5 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.

## **6 Policy Location**

The policy is available on the college intranet and 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 <https://www.ucg.ac.uk/policies>

## **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

United Colleges Group is committed to early intervention in addressing informal complaints from students and stakeholders to resolve issues before they escalate into formal complaints. The following procedure outlines the process for handling informal complaints effectively.

#### Early Resolution and Intervention

All staff should aim to resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity. For example:

- If a student raises an issue related to their course, they should first discuss it with their lecturer or group tutor.
- If unresolved, the student may escalate the issue to the Curriculum Manager or Assistant Principal.

#### Notes:

Informal complaints should generally be made within two calendar weeks of the event in question, except in exceptional circumstances. Anonymous complaints will not be considered under the informal complaint process.

#### Complaints Involving Staff Conduct

For informal complaints regarding staff conduct, the complaint may be evaluated against other College policies, such as the Grievance Policy or Staff Disciplinary Policy.

- If Human Resources (HR) deems the complaint appropriate for an HR-led investigation, HR will contact the complainant in writing and proceed with their process.
- If HR decides that the complaint does not warrant an HR investigation, it will refer the matter to Performance and Quality for further resolution. Both HR and the complainant will be informed of the investigation's outcome by Performance and Quality.

#### Procedure for Submitting an Informal Complaint

##### 1. Contacting the College:

- Enrolled students can contact the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator by phone or email at [complaints@ucg.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@ucg.ac.uk). Alternatively, complaints can be made through the College's Service Desk, which will direct the complaint to the relevant Curriculum Area.

##### 2. Response by the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator/Service Desk:

- The Senior Performance and Quality Administrator or Service Desk will notify the relevant Assistant Principal, Curriculum Manager, or Head of Service Area of the informal complaint for initial resolution.
- The Senior Performance and Quality Administrator informs the complainant of the staff member(s) to whom the complaint has been forwarded.

**Note:** No reference number will be assigned to informal complaints. The Assistant Principal or Head of Service must inform the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator of the outcome.

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.

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**

- Complaints may normally only be considered if the complaint is lodged no more than 2 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.

If a formal complaint involves a staff member's behavior, it may be assessed against other College policies, such as the Grievance Policy or Staff Disciplinary Policy.

- Human Resources (HR) will evaluate the complaint to determine if it warrants an HR-led investigation. If so, HR will contact the complainant in writing to proceed with their process.
- If HR decides that the complaint does not require an HR investigation, it will be referred to Performance and Quality for formal resolution. Performance and Quality will inform the complainant and update HR on the investigation's outcome.
- Should HR identify a need to initiate an HR-led investigation at any stage, HR will inform the complainant in writing, taking the matter outside of the formal complaints process.

#### **1. Initial Steps Upon Receiving a Formal Complaint**

Once a formal written complaint is submitted to the Performance and Quality department:

- The Senior Performance and Quality Administrator will assign a reference number, category (refer to Appendix 4), and an Investigation Manager.
- The complainant will receive written acknowledgment within 3 working days, confirming receipt of the complaint.
- The complainant will be informed of the Investigation Manager's name and given an expected resolution date, typically within 30 working days from the date the complaint was received.

#### **2. Investigation Process**

The Senior Performance and Quality Administrator will coordinate the investigation as follows:

- The Investigation Manager will contact the complainant to summarise and, if needed, clarify the complaint details and desired outcome.
- If the complaint raises safeguarding issues, Student Services will be informed.
- If the investigation is not completed within 15 working days, the Senior Performance and Quality Administrator will provide the complainant with an update on the progress and remind them of the anticipated resolution date.
- If, at any point, the complaint aligns more closely with another College policy (e.g., Grievance Policy, Staff Disciplinary Policy), this complaints process will pause, and the complainant will be informed of the new process and applicable timelines.

#### **3. Conclusion of Investigation**

Upon completion of the investigation:

- The Quality Assurance Leader will send a written response to the complainant, detailing the College's findings and response.
- The response will include information on the Appeals Process and a copy of the 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

#### **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 in the following categories:

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

#### **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

#### **4.3. Complaint about the behaviour of a member of staff**

This category includes complaints from students or stakeholders regarding the conduct of any staff member.

If a complaint involves a staff member's behaviour, it will be assessed to determine its nature and severity. Complaints that fall under other College policies, such as the Grievance Policy or Staff Disciplinary Policy, may be referred directly to Human Resources (HR) for consideration.

**Referral to Human Resources:**

- If the complaint meets criteria for an HR investigation, HR will take lead responsibility. HR will inform the complainant in writing of the initiation of an HR-led process.
- Should HR determine the complaint does not warrant an HR investigation, it will refer the matter back to Performance and Quality for formal resolution.

**Performance and Quality Review:**

- Upon referral, Performance and Quality will investigate and notify the student or stakeholder as appropriate.
- After investigation, Performance and Quality will communicate findings and outcomes to HR.

**Escalation to HR:**

- If, at any point during the Performance and Quality review, HR identifies that the complaint should transition to an HR-led process, HR will contact the complainant in writing and take over responsibility for the complaint. This step occurs independently of the formal complaints process.

**4.4 Complaint about the behaviour of a student by another student or 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**

#### **6.1 Appeals to the Vice 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 3 working days;
  - Will collate documentation relating to the original complaint, as well as new or additional evidence relating to the appeal to the Vice Principal within a further 3 working days
- The Vice Principal 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 with the Vice Principal's outcome which will contain:
  - The Vice Principal's response to the appeal, i.e. either the appeal has been upheld or not upheld
  - Any action the Vice Principal intends to take,
  - If the appeal has not been upheld; informing the complainant if they remain dissatisfied, they have the right to appeal to the Principal.

#### **6.2 Appeals to the Principal**

- The Principal will review the Vice Principal's response to the appeal within 5 working days to check if there is sufficient evidence to uphold or not uphold the Vice Principal's decision. The outcome will be communicated to the complainant. If the complainant is still dissatisfied, they have the right to appeal to the Chair of the College's Governing Body or their nominee.

#### **6.3 Appeals to the Chair of the College's Governing Body or their Nominee**

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

response to the appeal, stating that they wish to make an appeal to the Chair of the College's Governing Body or their nominee, outlining the grounds for the appeal, i.e. stating why the complainant was not satisfied with The Principal's response to the appeal.

- Once a request for an appeal to the Chair of College's Governing Body or their nominee 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 nominee.
- Within 20 working days of receiving the initial request for an appeal to the Chair of the College's Governing Body or their nominee, and after having consulted with the Chair of the College's Governing Body or the Chair's nominee, the Director of Governance will contact the complainant, informing them of the decision of Chair of the College's Governing Body/their nominee, 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 or the Chair's nominee, 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](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)
  - The relevant qualification regulator (if the complaint is related to a qualification or examination)
- 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>