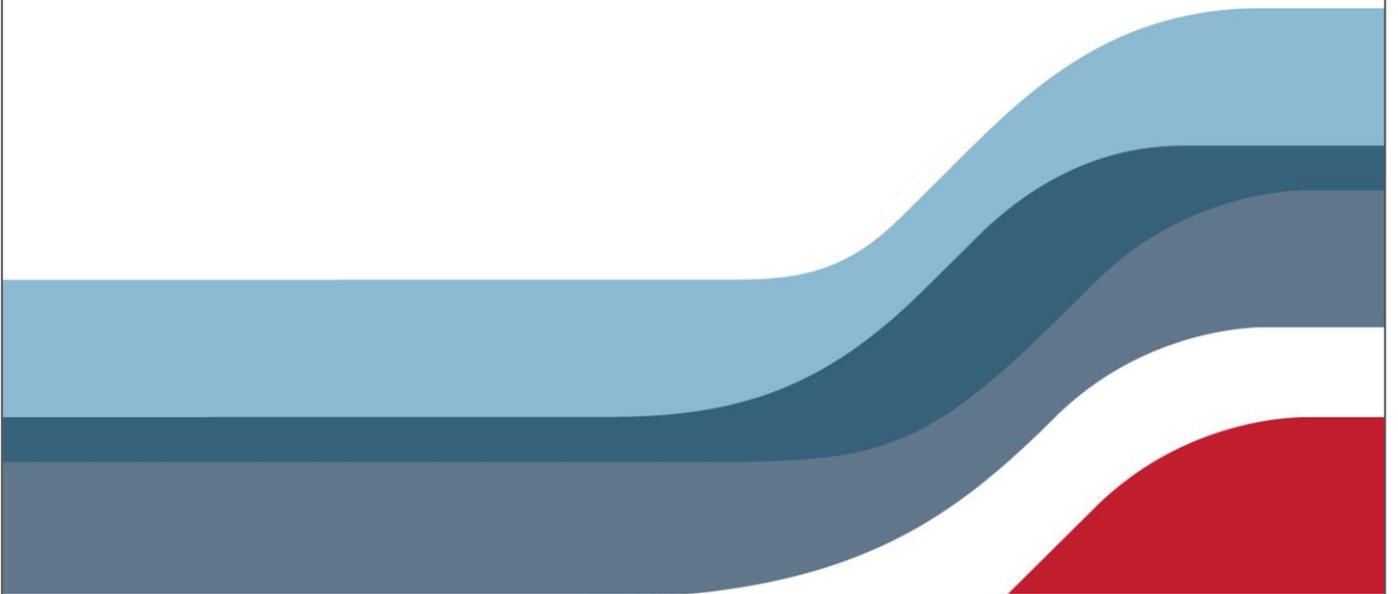


Complaints Policy and Procedure



Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

This policy and procedures have been developed to support the College Mission Statement of:

'Leading excellence in learning for jobs and careers'.

Its purpose is the recognition that all users of the College's services have a right to raise complaints and to have problems investigated and appropriately acted upon.

2. Commitment

South Thames College welcomes and encourages feedback from students and members of the public to enable continuous improvement of our services. Where complaints occur the College makes every effort to resolve them quickly at the most appropriate level.

3. Scope and Definitions

3.1. This policy applies to all complaints from enrolled students and applicants for places, parents/carers of students under 18, employers and other users of College services and facilities.

3.2. Any expressed dissatisfaction with the following will be treated as a complaint:

3.2.1. Failure by the college to meet obligations including those outlined in course/student handbooks

3.2.2. Concerns about the delivery of a course, quality of teaching or administration

3.2.3. The quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided directly by the college

3.2.4. Complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing services on behalf of the college.

3.3. The Policy does not cover complaints about academic assessment i.e. grades and marks which are covered by the Academic Appeals procedure

3.4. Staff complaints will be resolved using the College's Staff Grievance Procedures

3.5. Complaints which are deemed to fall into any of the categories listed below will not be considered under the scope of this policy and procedure.

- Anonymous
- Already been investigated and disposed of
- Outside the scope of the procedure
- Made without disclosing adequate grounds
- Made outside the time limit
- Been disposed of in court or tribunal proceedings brought by the complainant or under settlement agreement between the complainant and

- o the college
- o Are malicious, vexatious or frivolous

- 3.6. If a student is found to have made a malicious complaint, this could lead to disciplinary action being taken.
- 3.7. It is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved satisfactorily on an informal basis and close to their point of origin. If it is apparent that the complaint is of a general nature, it may be more appropriate for the matter to be taken up through the appropriate School staff/student committee.

4. Legal Framework

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) requires colleges to have a complaints procedure. The Complaints Policy and Procedure also supports the College's policy on Equality and Diversity.

5. Principles

- 5.1. Whenever possible any concerns will be dealt with as soon as any member of the College staff is made aware of them.
- 5.2. The College will only respond to formal complaints that have been raised **within three months** of the occurrence of the complaint.
- 5.3. A formal complaint will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt by the Complaints Officer.
- 5.4. The Head of Learning and Quality Improvement will act as the College's Complaints Officer and maintain a full record of complaints received and their outcome.
- 5.5. Following the investigation a response will be sent to the complainant within 20 working days. Where more time is needed e.g. the complaint is complex or the College term breaks prevent the completion of the investigation, the complainant will be sent an interim letter outlining progress with the investigation and giving a date for the full response.
- 5.6. Responses to complaints will include details on appeals. Valid appeals (see Section 9.1) will usually be investigated and responded to within 20 working days.
- 5.7. Although College staff cannot make a complaint on behalf of a student, they will assist in recording a complaint. The Student Service Team/Advice Centre staff and personal Tutors will, on request, provide support for enrolled students in presenting a complaint.

6. College Responsibility

- 6.1. All staff are responsible for ensuring that complaints are dealt with in a supportive, courteous and timely manner.
- 6.2. Complaints will usually be investigated by the manager responsible for the provision, service, procedure or facility about which the complaint is made.

6.3. A complainant has the right of appeal against the response to his/her complaint (see section 9).

6.4. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality will investigate and respond to valid appeals by the complainant.

7. Complainant Responsibility

7.1. Complainants are expected to bring their complaint to the College's attention within one of the reason for the complaint occurring.

7.2. To facilitate the investigation the complainant should explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible (such as including names, times, dates) and include any action taken to date.

7.3. Complainants must recognise that in some circumstances are beyond the control of the College which will impact on the final outcome of any complaint.

8. The Procedure

8.1. Stage 1 (Informal)

8.1.1. 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.

8.1.2. If the complainant is unable to raise their concern with the staff who has direct responsibility then the complaint should be made to the curriculum or service manager who should try to achieve a satisfactory resolution

8.1.3. If the complainant does not feel that their concerns have been addressed by the member of staff within the School, then they should make a formal complaint to the College Complaints Officer.

8.1.4. The complaint may involve the Manager in 8.1.2, in such cases it is reasonable to progress directly 8.2.3.

8.2. Stage 2 (Formal)

8.2.1. On receipt of a formal complaint, the College Complaints Officer will log the complaint using the College Complaint Report Log and acknowledge its receipt within 5 working days.

8.2.2. If a College Department/School receives a formal complaint in writing they must add the date when it was received before passing the communication immediately to the College Complaints Officer who will log it and acknowledge its receipt to the complainant

8.2.3. The College Complaints Officer will then appoint an appropriate investigating manager who will conduct a full investigation and this will

normally be the relevant Head of School/Service. However, if that person has already had some involvement with the issue, another Head of School/Department will be appointed to conduct the investigation.

8.2.4. Within 15 working days of receiving a complaint from the College Complaints Officer, the investigating manager will provide the College Complaints Officer with the results of the investigation and a signed letter of reply for the complainant detailing the outcome and actions arising from the investigation.

8.2.5. In highly exceptional cases where the investigating manager is unable to meet the above timescale, the investigating manager will inform the College Complaints Officer, who, in turn, will communicate this to the complainant and the Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality

8.2.6. The College Complaints Officer will advise the Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality of any investigations where a complaint has not been fully resolved.

9. Appeals

9.1. 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 procedure was not followed.

10. Appeals Procedure

10.1. The complainant should make their appeal in writing to the Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality within 15 days of the date of the letter outlining the outcomes of the investigation. The letter of appeal should clearly state the grounds of appeal (see above). Any appeals which do not include this information will not be considered.

10.2. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality will review the investigation and provide a written response to the complainant usually within 20 working days.

10.3. If the appeal is upheld, the College will apologise and make clear the actions taken to address the issue. If the appeal is not upheld, the response will detail the findings of the appeal process.

10.4. Both the appeal and the response will be copied to the College Complaints Officer.

10.5. In exceptional circumstances, the Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality will convene a panel. This would only occur where significant new evidence has been received.

- 10.6. It is the responsibility of the Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality to convene the appeal panel which will consist of a member of the Senior Leadership Team and another senior manager.
- 10.7. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality agrees a date for the appeal hearing and confirms the details in writing to the complainant. The appeal panel meeting is usually arranged within 20 working days of the receipt of the grounds for appeal.
- 10.8. The complainant will be offered the opportunity to be accompanied by a friend or a representative (who may not be a practising solicitor or barrister).
- 10.9. The appeal panel considers the matters identified in the grounds for appeal and may uphold, amend or overturn the original decision of the College.
- 10.10. The record of the decision of the appeal panel will be provided within 10 working days of the panel meeting.
- 10.11. There is no further right of appeal within the College's procedures. Complainants can contact the relevant external funding agency if they feel the College has not dealt with the complaint according to this procedure.

11. Monitoring

- 11.1. An annual report to the Governors will provide an analysis of complaints and the action which the College has taken as a result of them.
- 11.2. The monitoring process will be used to ensure that all complainants are treated fairly and equally.
- 11.3. The College will collect and analyse the following information on complainants (where available) to identify differences between groups and to allow issues to be identified and addressed:
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Ethnic origin
 - Disability
 - Course and mode of study

Age, gender, ethnic origin, course and mode of study will be identified through the College Information System (CIS). In order to identify disability, a full list of the learner ID numbers of complainants will be sent to the Head of Service – Learner Support, S/he will provide an anonymous analysis by disability, learning difficulty and/or medical condition.

12. Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the College's Senior Leadership Team.

13. Breach of the Policy

The College will take seriously any instances of non-adherence to the College's policy

by its staff. Where appropriate, instances may be referred to the College's disciplinary procedure.

14. Access to the Policy

14.1. The Policy will be published on the South Thames College BlackBoard intranet and available to students and members of the public on request.

14.2. The Policy and Procedures will be available in large print format, on disk or by email within 5 working days by request to the Complaints Officer.

The address of the College Complaints Officer is:

College Complaints Officer
South Thames College
Wandsworth High Street
Wandsworth
London SW18 2PP
Email: complaints.officer@south-thames.ac.uk

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| Produced by: | Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality |
| Date reviewed: | September 2015 |
| Approved by: | SLT |
| Date approved: | November 2015 |
| Review by: | September 2017 |