



## **QUALITY, STANDARDS & MARKETING DIRECTORATE**

### **Handling Customer Complaints**

#### **Guidelines**

These guidelines have been devised to ensure fairness and equity for all parties involved in the handling of complaints and to enable a balanced and objective approach to be taken so that a satisfactory conclusion can be reached.

The Collegiate defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction which merits a response.

These guidelines relate to:

- Courses, services or facilities provided by the Collegiate
- Action or lack of action taken by the Collegiate and its staff

The guidelines do not cover:

- Disciplinary issues
- Matters governed by other separate procedures such as harassment, appeals against exclusion or academic appeals.

There is ongoing monitoring of complaints received by the College. This is carried out by the Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality) in association with the Quality, Standards & Marketing Directorate. As part of the Performance Management Cycle regular reports go to Senior Management and to Governors through Standards and Curriculum Committee. A summary of complaints received within the academic year is used to inform self-assessment and strategic planning.

#### **Responding to Complaints**

Every reasonable effort will be made to deal promptly and efficiently with all complaints, to investigate them thoroughly and objectively and to seek to resolve them satisfactorily. Whilst every complaint is taken seriously and investigated fully, every effort is also made to ensure that staff of the Collegiate understand that they have equal rights in the process and that they are treated with fairness and objectivity.

Complaints will be dealt with positively, constructively and as far as possible confidentially. If a complaint is upheld the Collegiate will seek to provide a reasonable and appropriate response and will correct any mistakes or

misunderstandings and will take any other action as appropriate. Where a complaint is upheld against an individual or group this will be dealt with confidentially. Action will be through internal processes and procedures and specific details not reported to the complainant.

Although complaints will be dealt with in confidence this is with the proviso that an individual against whom a complaint is made has the right to be supplied with a copy of the complaint made against them.

Complaints against members of staff of the Collegiate are always classified as formal complaints. The Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality) must therefore be notified of the complaint.

The Collegiate will treat all complaints seriously and without discrimination. However, where an investigation concludes there is reasonable grounds to believe that the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice, appropriate action will be taken against the complainant. The college reserves the right not to investigate where ongoing complaints are made and grounds for complaint have previously not been found.

The time limits set out in these guidelines will normally be followed. However, where for good reason this is not possible, the complainant will be kept notified of progress.

The effectiveness of any complaints procedure depends on the Collegiate being able to collect appropriate information from parties involved in order to investigate the matter properly. For this reason, anonymous complaints will not be dealt with under these guidelines.

These guidelines comprise of a number of stages. Most complaints can be resolved informally by individuals pursuing matters directly with relevant staff. Only where these informal routes have been pursued and the complainant remains dissatisfied, should the formal complaint be invoked.

All complaints should be raised within **one month** of the instance which led to the complaint.

### **Informal Complaints Procedure**

Most complaints can be resolved informally and where practical a complaint should be dealt with as close as possible to the point at which it arises.

This relates to informal complaints, such as those received verbally and/or those relating to what the complainant views as relatively minor incidents.

This also relates to complaints made by student representatives in student feedback or course team meetings.

Although all these complaints are classified as “informal complaints” for the purposes of these guidelines, they are all taken seriously and should be investigated thoroughly by the appropriate member of staff.

The member of staff who receives an informal complaint will look into the matter and give a verbal response to the complainant/s within 10 working days of the complaint being registered.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied then a formal complaint in writing should be made.

## **Formal Complaints**

All formal complaints should be made to QSM. Where formal complaints are received by the Principal or other staff at the Collegiate these should be forwarded to QSM for logging in the first instance.

Formal complaints can be received by letter, email, telephone, or in person by the complainant. Where complaints are received over the telephone or verbally QSM will ensure completion of the standard Complaints Form, detailing:

- The nature of the complaint
- The informal steps already taken with full details of the response received
- A statement setting out why the complainant remains dissatisfied.

Under normal operating circumstances receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of its receipt.

QSM will co-ordinate and act as administrator for the duration of the complaint investigation.

Formal complaints once acknowledged will be forwarded to the Quality Assurance Manager. A full and thorough investigation will then be carried out.

Where appropriate the Quality Assurance Manager may require a detailed discussion with the complainant to agree the terms of reference for the investigation, confirm key points of concern or to obtain further particulars of the complaint.

The Quality Assurance Manager may wish to convene a hearing involving the complainant and any other persons involved in the matter so they can submit their respective cases. A representative from Human Resources will also be invited where a complaint about a member of staff is being investigated.

All parties involved including students and staff can be accompanied by a person of their choice to offer support, assistance or advice and any meetings during the investigation. The person can be a friend, recognised trade union member or member of staff but should not constitute legal representation.

After completing the investigation the Quality Assurance Manager will make a decision. Where the complaint is upheld the QSM has authority to refund fees (from Faculty budgets) or offer small gestures (such as flowers, cinema tickets or gift vouchers) as an apology and to restore goodwill. The Director of Quality, Standards & Marketing will also ensure remedial action is taken to ensure similar complaints do not arise in the future.

The decision will be communicated in writing to the complainant and all other relevant parties, normally within 15 working days of the acknowledgement of the complaint. Where the investigation is likely to take longer all parties will be informed and kept up to date at regular intervals subject to a maximum total investigation period of 30 working days.

### **Complaint Review**

The stages of the guidelines set out above have been established to allow a fair and thorough investigation of a complaint and to ensure that it is dealt with objectively. If the complainant, or any party involved in the investigation, believes that a complaint has not been dealt with properly or fairly, they may submit a letter of appeal to the Principal within 5 days of receipt of the decision.

The Principal will consider the circumstances of the case on the basis of the documentary evidence and such advice felt necessary, in order to determine whether there is prima facie evidence to support the complainant's appeal that the case was not handled properly or fairly.

In exceptional circumstances, where appropriate and should sufficient evidence exist for further investigation, the Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality) may lead a further enquiry.

The Principal's decision will then be final on the basis of the evidence and advice available or in the case of a further investigation on the basis of the recommendations of the Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality).

The Principal's decision will be communicated in writing, normally within 10 working days of the date the request for review was received.

In exceptional circumstances where the complainant is still dissatisfied with the decision reached by the Principal, complaints can be pursued with the Skills Funding Agency/Young People's Learning Agency or the Local Education Authority.

## Communication

Students will be made aware of this procedure through the Student Handbook and Student Representative training.

All staff will be made aware of the contents of this procedure via Infopoint and staff development. Copies of this procedure are accessible by all staff via the College Intranet (Infopoint) and from QSM. Management development and staff development will be provided through HR to assist all staff in responding effectively to complaints.

- **Staff / students who do not have English as their first language**

There are a number of students within the Collegiate who do not have English as their first language.

The ESOL course (English for Speaks of Other Languages) is popular and attracts students from other cultures who speak a diverse range of languages.

If staff or students who have difficulty understanding the complaints procedure or making a complaint due to the lack of spoken or written English will be offered support through an interpreter if required.

- **Staff / students who have difficulty communicating due to disability**

If students with a disability have difficulty understanding and reading the complaints procedure or in making a complaint, support will be offered. For example

1. People who have a Hearing Impairment
  - a. Hearing loop
  - b. Sign language
2. People with a Visual Impairment
  - c. Documents can be converted to brail
  - d. A reader can be provided
3. People with Learning Disability
  - e. An easy read version of the complaints procedure can be made available
  - f. An Advocate can assist the person with learning disabilities to make the complaint.



## COMPLAINTS FORM

The purpose of this form is for individuals to register a complaint. Complainants can also be made in writing by letter or email to the Quality, Standards & Marketing Directorate [QSM] [quality@warrington.ac.uk](mailto:quality@warrington.ac.uk) .

### Complainant Details

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: Work \_\_\_\_\_ Home \_\_\_\_\_ Mob \_\_\_\_\_

### Details of Complaint (A brief summary of the complaint including times & dates)

### Informal action already taken and details of the response

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date received by QSM