

FEEDBACK POLICY & PROCEDURE

1. Policy statement

Quality of service is an important measure of the effectiveness of public bodies. We at the South Thames Colleges Group understand that feedback is a valuable tool and should be treated sensitively and respectfully. We believe that learning from feedback is a powerful way of helping the South Thames Colleges Group to safeguard, improve and increase trust and open communication amongst the people who use our services.

We treat a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, from a user of or partner to the South Thames Colleges Group.

We have learned that compliments indicate the parts of our service that are most appreciated and often result in a welcome opportunity to recognise and praise our members of staff and spread good practice.

Our policy covers feedback about:

- a) The standard of service we provide
- b) The behaviour of our staff, and
- c) Any action or lack of action by the South Thames Colleges Group

Our policy covers feedback received from:

- a) Enrolled learners
- b) Applicants
- c) Parents/carers
- d) Employers or other users of Group services and facilities
- e) Members of the public

Our policy does not cover:

- a) Complaints of a minor nature which should be dealt with locally within Schools, Curriculum Areas and/or Directorates
- b) Comments about our policies or policy decisions
- c) Dissatisfaction with our policies or decisions about individual cases or grants or requests for legal assistance
- d) Matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaints procedure
- e) Complaints raised by students, or their parents/sponsors where fees have not been paid in full or an instalment plan not complied with
- f) Anonymous complaints may be investigated, if enough evidence is given to do so. Sufficient evidence to warrant an investigation will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- g) Abusive and/or overly persistent complainant behaviour containing, for example, offensive language which we will not progress or take seriously and reserve the right to take action against the perpetrator(s)
- h) Staff complaints, as there are more appropriate HR procedures to use
- i) Complaints about academic assessment (covered by the Assessment Policy)
- j) Applicant appeals (covered by the Admissions Policy)
- k) Complaints made outside the response time limit of 12 months since the issue originally occurred

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- l) Complaints that have been disposed of in court or tribunal proceedings bought by the complainant or under settlement agreement between the complainant and the Group.
- j) Complaints where evidence of recordings or conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

Compliments

Compliments that are presented in writing or considered to surpass day-to-day professional practice should be forwarded to the College Feedback Lead, who will forward it on to the relevant Manager for information. The compliment should also be filed and entered onto the Group Feedback Log.

Stage 1

All formal complaints must be presented in writing (apart from instances where allegations of serious misconduct/behaviour are made and waiting for a written communication could create unnecessary delay and potential harm). Complaints will be logged by the designated College Feedback Lead before being acknowledged. In the first instance, it will be forwarded to the relevant Head of School/Curriculum Manager or Director to investigate and resolve (all Managers/Directors across the Group receive internal training and updates on a yearly basis, related to Safeguarding and the LADO function (Local Authority Designated Officer for Safeguarding and referral process)).

A record of any actions /correspondence/supporting evidence and outcome must be copied to the designated College Feedback Lead, filed and entered onto the Log.

The stages of the complaints procedure

We have a two-stage complaints procedure. At each stage it will help us to resolve your complaint quickly if you can give us as much clear detail as possible, including any supporting documents and correspondence and stating that you are making a complaint in line with our procedure.

Complaints which cannot be resolved informally or at Stage 1 or Stage 2 should always include an independent internal investigation at the next Stage to aid resolution.

It is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved satisfactorily and on an informal basis and close to their point of origin. Informal resolution is taken seriously by the Group; all staff have a responsibility for ensuring that complaints are dealt with in a supportive and courteous manner. Before moving to formal investigation, an internal, independent member of the Group will look at the means by which an informal resolution was attempted.

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This is the first opportunity for us to resolve your dissatisfaction, and the majority of complaints will be dealt with at this stage.

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days

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- Full response within 20 working days

Stage 2

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request a review. To begin Stage 2 of the procedure, we require a written request made to the College Feedback Lead within five working days of you receiving your Stage 1 response (apart from instances where allegations of serious misconduct/behaviour are made and waiting for a written communication could create unnecessary delay and potential harm).

An internal, independent member of the management team will be nominated to formally investigate your complaint to date. A written response, detailing the findings of this investigation, will be sent to you along with a decision as to whether your complaint has been upheld. Please note that this decision is final and marks the end of our complaints process, there is no further right of appeal within the Group process.

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days
- Full response within 20 working days

Extending time limits

We aim to complete all complaints within the timescales above; however, if a complaint is very complex, where delay may cause potential harm or is received during a holiday period, it may be necessary to extend or expediate the time limits. If this is the case, we will keep you informed of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and inform you of the new deadline.

If having followed the two stages of our complaints procedure you still remain dissatisfied, you can ask to have your complaint reviewed externally by an agency with no direct link to the Group. You would be advised by us of who this would be, which in most cases, will be the Education Skills Funding Agency. For Higher Education students, if following the issue by the College of its “completion of procedure letter” the complaint has still not been resolved to your satisfaction, you can refer your complaint to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Students in Higher Education (OIA) (website <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>). The OIA is an independent body set up to review student complaints against Higher Education Providers in England and Wales and which is free to students.

Following any stage of the procedure, a complainant has a maximum of five days from the date of the final response to request that their complaint be progressed to the next stage.

Our standards for handling complaints

We treat all complaints seriously provided that they are not made abusively or offensively and comply with the guidance above. You will be treated with courtesy, fairness and with your safeguarding and wellbeing uppermost at all times. We would hope, too, that you will be courteous and fair in your dealings with us at all times. We will treat your complaint in confidence within the Group and we will deal with your complaint promptly.

We will not treat you less favourably than anyone else because of your: sex or marital status: this includes family status, responsibility for dependants, and gender (including gender reassignment, whether proposed, commenced or completed) sexual orientation colour or race: this includes ethnic or national origin or nationality, disability, religious or political beliefs, trade union affiliation, or other unjustifiable factors, for example language difficulties or age.

Confidentiality

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. In some matters related to Safeguarding, it may be necessary to refer a complaint the LADO.

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Remedies to complaints

When we get things wrong, we will act to:

- a) Accept responsibility
- b) Explain what went wrong and why, and
- c) Put things right by making any changes required. The action we take to put matters right (i.e., redress) in response to a complaint, can include any combination of the remedies set out in the list below. The general principle we follow is that a complainant should, so far as possible, be put in the position he or she would have been in, had things not gone wrong.

The remedy we choose will be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in service, and take into account what people are looking for when they complain. An apology is normally appropriate, but other action may also be necessary.

- A sincere and meaningful apology (explaining what happened and/or what went wrong) – an apology is not an acceptance of liability under Section 2 of the Compensation Act 2006
- Remedial action, which may include reviewing or changing a decision on the service given to an individual complainant
- Provide service desired by complainant (immediately, if appropriate)
- Putting things right (for example change of procedures to prevent future difficulties of a similar kind, either for the complainant or others)
- Training or supervising staff; or any combination of these

Unreasonable behaviour

All complaints will be processed in accordance with this policy. However, during this process, staff may have contact with unreasonable complainant behaviour and unreasonably persistent complainants. Where behaviour of this type occurs we reserve the right to end the process and reject the complaint. We believe it unreasonable too that a complaint is pursued by anyone owing the College fees, although we do have provision for those experiencing genuine hardship.

Recording and monitoring feedback

We will log the feedback we receive so that we can monitor good practice and problems, the best way to sort them out and how long we are taking to deal with them. This also helps us to take a closer look at what we are doing well and how we can further improve our own service delivery. Quality and Innovation will analyse the following information on feedback (where available) to identify feedback patterns and differences between groups: age, gender, ethnic origin, disability learning difference and school/curriculum area and mode of study. The Senior Post Holders Group and Group Leadership Team monitor this information on a termly basis and Quality will also report on the numbers and categories of feedback we receive to the Governing Body on an annual basis.

Review

This policy and procedure will be reviewed on an annual basis and will be available via the relevant College websites.

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Contacting us

All complaints and requests for review under our complaints policy and procedures should be sent to one of the following addresses:

For complaints related to Carshalton College

Email: feedback@carshalton.ac.uk

Post to: Complaints
Carshalton College
Nightingale Road
Carshalton
SM5 2EJ

For complaints related to Kingston College

Email: feedback@kingston-college.ac.uk

Post to: Complaints
Kingston College
Kingston Hall Road
Kingston upon Thames,
Surrey, KT1 2AQ

For complaints related to South Thames College

Email: feedback@south-thames.ac.uk

Post to: Complaints
South Thames College
Wandsworth High Street
Wandsworth
London, SW18 2PP

For complaints related to Merton College

Email: feedback@merton.ac.uk

Address: Complaints
South Thames College
Executive Suite
Wandsworth High Street
London
SW18 2PP

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