



THE
TRAFFORD
COLLEGE
GROUP

Section:	Higher Education Student Complaints Policy
Version:	2
Author:	Mark Harris
Introduction:	March 2017
Review Date:	August 2019

REVISION HISTORY

Version	Date	Author	Description
1	March 17	Mark Harris	Initial Approval
1.1	Nov 17	Tristan Edwards	Trafford College adopted Policy
2	April 18	Mark Harris	Trafford College Group Approval, amendments to titles, roles

APPROVAL

Version	Committee	Approval Date	Comment
1	CMT	March 17	
1.1	Executive	November 17	
2	HECOMM	May 18	

HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY

Introduction

1. The Trafford College Group strives to provide the highest quality of service on all matters pertaining to the provision of Higher Education (HE). However, the College recognises that there will be occasions where HE students wish to register dissatisfaction or concern. On such occasions, students will need to be guided to this policy to allow their complaint to be heard.

Scope

2. This policy is to be used to address complaints associated with:
 - College Policies, Procedures or Regulations,
 - Academic and non-academic services (excluding academic *judgement*),
 - Academic and non-academic facilities such as catering or IT,
 - The conduct or actions of a member, or members, of staff,
 - Misinformation regarding academic programmes, College support services and facilities.

This policy is not to be used to address:

- Academic appeals/judgement,
- Appeals against disciplinary actions and/or decision,
- Any kind of bullying or harassment,
- Refusal of admission to applicants who have not met academic entry thresholds; or where there is evidence that they cannot (or are likely to be unable to) meet the academic, professional (such as DBS checks) or vocational requirements.

In the case of complaints against admissions decisions, please refer to the Higher Education Admissions Policy and Procedure. The complaints procedure pertaining to admissions is informed by this policy but those complaints do not fall within the purview of this policy.

Policy Statements

3. In line with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education, a complaint is defined as:

“The expression of a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of a learner’s learning opportunities”

4. The College is guided by the following principles:
 - i. Complaint handling will be fair,
 - ii. The policy and procedure should encourage informal resolution at the local level to facilitate early resolution where possible,
 - iii. Complaints will be dealt with appropriate seriousness and confidentiality

- iv. All complaints will be thoroughly and objectively investigated,
 - v. Complainants will be treated equally and will not be treated adversely as a result of their complaint,
 - vi. Every attempt will be made to resolve issues on an informal basis in the first instance, without recourse to a formal procedure.
5. If at any stage the complaint is made the subject of a formal discussion or hearing, students are entitled to be accompanied by a member of staff, fellow student, parent or guardian. If a student intends to bring legal representation to the College, they are asked to notify the College in good time – usually three working days.
6. Complaints should take the form of a letter, email or fax and where appropriate be supported by evidence. In exceptional circumstances, the College is prepared to accept a complaint over the telephone whereby an administrator will receive dictation from the Complainant.

Eligibility

7. This policy applies to all students enrolled to a higher education course at The Trafford College Group.

Collective complaints

8. Where issues raised in a complaint affect a number of students, those students can submit a 'group complaint'. Where this happens, and in order to manage the administration and progression of the complaint, we will normally ask the group to nominate one student to act as a group representative.

Timescales and service levels

9. Complaints should be made without undue delay. The normal time limit for submitting a complaint is within four working weeks after having become aware of the matter that the learner is dissatisfied with.
10. Students that have recently left a programme of study may only raise issues of complaint within three months after the conferral of the award or withdrawal from the programme. Students wishing to lodge appeals against assessment board decisions should refer to the appropriate Academic Appeals Policy.
11. Extension of these time limits will normally only be possible in exceptional circumstances, such as illness or other circumstances beyond the student's control.
12. Complaints should not be vexatious in nature. Where, after proper investigation, there is reason to believe that a complaint is vexatious or motivated by malice, disciplinary action may be taken against the student under the College's disciplinary policy. A Completion of Procedures letter may be issued at this point.

Third party complaints

13. The College recognises that some individuals may be unable to make a complaint on their own. In these circumstances, complaints brought by permitted third parties, (for example a family member or legal representative) will only be accepted when the individual affected has provided written confirmation and the Dean of Higher Education has approved the request. This request can be submitted at the same time as the complaint. Complaints from third parties will not usually be accepted.
14. Where the College believes students to be communicating through a third party without providing written consent, the College will seek clarification from the complainant that there is no unauthorised third party involvement. The complaint processes and timescales may be extended while clarification is sought.

The Procedure

Stage One: Informal Resolution

15. This should be the first method by which students and staff attempt to deal with any concerns.
16. The College encourages students to raise problems, questions and concerns promptly and responsibly. Timely notification of concerns directly with the member of staff involved will normally lead to a quick and satisfactory informal resolution of most issues.
17. If a student remains dissatisfied, they may lodge a formal complaint as described at Stage two of the process outlined below (paragraph 18).

Stage Two: Formal complaint to Head of School

18. Students should submit a formal complaint in writing to their Head of School. The complainant must be clear as to the nature of the complaint and, wherever possible, quote times, dates and details that allow the ensuing investigation to focus on the matter at hand.
19. The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days and via the method of communication it arrived, i.e. email, letter etc. The complainant should expect a full response within 10 working days.
20. (S)He will investigate the issue either personally or instruct a member of the wider College Management Team to carry out the investigation.
21. It may be necessary to contact the complainant to gather further information or understanding of the context and complaint itself.

Stage Three: Dean of Higher Education

22. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response they receive from their Head of School, students have up to 10 College working days to write to the Dean of Higher Education, identifying their reasons for their dissatisfaction.
23. The Dean of Higher Education will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days. (S)He will investigate the issue, either personally or in conjunction with the appropriate manager(s) from the wider College Management Team.
24. Under normal circumstances a formal response will be with you within 10 working days.

Stage Four: Review by Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality)

25. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they will have 10 College working days to write to the Vice Principal, identifying the reasons for their dissatisfaction, requesting a review of the complaint. The request for review, which should include all relevant documentation and further details where necessary, will be acknowledged within 5 College working days.
26. A full response will follow, usually within 15 College working days.
27. Attached to this review document will be a Completion of Procedures notice, detailing that all stages of the internal processes have been exhausted.

This ends the College Higher Education Complaint Procedure

28. **Where a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 4 process they may have the opportunity to appeal to the appropriate external body. Where procedures allow this with our validating universities, it is normally a requirement of the above that a complaint has completed stage 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the College's complaint process.**

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)

29. The Trafford College Group is a member organisation of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).
30. If a student remains dissatisfied after completing all stages of the Colleges Complaints procedure, they are entitled to ask the OIA to review their complaint.
31. The OIA will only consider complaints from students who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of the College's internal complaints procedures and processes.
32. All applications to the OIA must be made within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter issued by the College.
33. The OIA look at issues such as whether we, and the validating partner (where applicable), followed our procedures, whether those procedures were reasonable, and

whether the final decision was reasonable in the circumstances. The OIA cannot normally look at complaints:

- Where the learner has not progressed through all stages of the complaints procedures;
- Where the complaint refers to matters more than three years old;
- Where matters have been or are being considered in court.

34. The OIA's Scheme Rules and guidelines are available on its website: www.oiahe.org.uk

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Confidentiality

35. All complaints will be judged on their individual merit and will be dealt with in confidence. No complaint will affect the way a student is treated or assessed in their studies.
36. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality, but proper and thorough investigation of a complaint may require the disclosure of confidential information. Should this be the case, the student making the complaint will be notified to check that they wish to proceed with their complaint.
37. Should a complaint involve the conduct or actions of a member of staff, such parties will have the right to see any evidence or documents relating to the complaint as part of the investigation.

Disabled Students

38. Where a student has declared a disability to the College, all endeavours will be made to ensure that information is available to them at all stages in appropriate formats and that reasonable adjustments are made to the proceedings and facilities to accommodate their needs.

Support and Representation

39. If a student is considering making a complaint, advice can be sought from a number of sources. These may include one or more drawn from, for example, their Course Leaders, Student Representatives or the relevant Higher Education Head of School.
40. Students may wish to engage with one or more of the above to discuss if their concern should be considered a complaint in either the informal or formal sense or if there are alternative ways of reducing their concern. They may also engage with one or more of the above to seek guidance and support on understanding the requirements of the complaints procedure.
41. A student making a complaint has the right to be accompanied at any formal meetings or hearings concerning their complaint, as at paragraph 5.

Policy Monitoring

42. Accountability for the Student Complaints Procedure is designated to the Dean of Higher Education.

43. The administration and monitoring of the Student Complaints Procedure will be carried out by Academic Registrar (Higher Education).
44. All complaints will be recorded centrally and will be subject to a monitoring and reporting system.
45. Where a complaint is upheld, the College will take reasonable action within its power to ensure that similar situations do not occur in the future.
46. In order to facilitate monitoring of volume and type of complaints, any member of staff receiving notification of a complaint from a student studying a Higher Education programme must advise the Academic Registrar (Higher Education) as soon as they receive initial notification. The complaint will then be dealt with as at section 4, detailed above.
47. An annual written report to be approved by the Dean of Higher Education will be submitted to the Higher Education Committee. This report will detail complaints investigated during the year, which shall include comment on whether outcomes have been appropriate, this information will be shared with our University Partners.

APPENDIX: COMPLETION OF PROCEDURES NOTICE

Higher Education Department
Stockport College
Town Centre Campus
Wellington Road South
Cheshire
SK1 3UQ

Date

Address 1
Address 2
Address 3
County
Postcode

STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Dear *[Name of complainant]*,

Completion of Procedures Letter

This letter confirms that the internal procedures of Stockport College (SC) in relation to your complaint regarding *[please describe]* have been completed.

The issues that you raised in your complaint were *[details]*

The issue(s) that were considered in relation to your complaint was/were*: *[brief summary of the complaint etc]*.

The final decision of the College is *[detail]* because *[reasons]*.

The procedures/regulations applied were: *[details and date as supplied to the OIA's electronic Regulations Bank]*.

Under the Higher Education Act 2004 the College subscribes to the independent scheme for the review of learner complaints. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome you may be able to apply for a review of your *complaint/appeal** to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) providing that the complaint you take to the OIA is eligible under its Rules.

Should you decide to make a complaint to the OIA, your OIA Complaint Form must be received by the OIA within 12 months of the date of this letter, that is, it must be received by the OIA on or before *[insert date - e.g. if the Completion of Procedures Letter is dated 7 January 2015, this date should be 7 January 2016]*.

The OIA's leaflet, 'An Introduction to the OIA for Learners,' can be downloaded from http://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/34396/oia_intro_leaflet.pdf *[please check link]* and a link to the OIA Complaint Form is available on page 8. Alternatively, you can telephone or write to the OIA for a form. You should send a copy of this letter to the OIA with your OIA Complaint Form.

Guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can also be found on the OIA's website <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia.aspx> *[please check link]*. You may also wish to seek advice from the National Union of Learners about taking your complaint to the OIA.

Please note that the OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with through the College's internal procedures.

Yours sincerely,

[Authorised signatory]

*delete as appropriate