



**Buckinghamshire  
College Group**

# **Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure 2018-20**

Responsible Officer: Executive Director Business Development and Marketing  
Date: September 2018  
Review date: September 2020  
Available: Website/Cloud/Intranet/Reception/Learning Centre

## COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

### POLICY

1. This policy outlines how Buckinghamshire College Group will deal with compliments, comments and complaints from customers and stakeholders.
2. Buckinghamshire College Group strives to achieve the highest standards of customer service for all stakeholders. Customer service standards are defined through each department's annual Quality Improvement Plan. Service standards are monitored and maintained by department managers and directors.
3. Buckinghamshire College Group is committed to having a formal Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure which allows customers to provide valuable feedback about our products and services. This will ensure that we provide quality services for our customers and are responsive to their needs.
4. Customers are defined as: Students, External customers using College facilities, Businesses, Organisations or individuals that the College works with or has a business relationship with.
5. The purpose of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy is:
  - a. To encourage customer feedback
  - b. To provide effective means for people who use Buckinghamshire College Group's services to provide feedback, whether positive or negative
  - c. To confirm the individual's right to complain or share their opinions
  - d. To ensure that compliments, comments and complaints are dealt with effectively and impartially
  - e. To direct that complaints should be resolved:
    - as quickly as possible
    - as close to the point of delivery as possible
    - fairly (for all parties)
    - with the minimum of inconvenience to the Complainant
    - In a consultative manner and with the aim of agreeing a solution
  - f. To ensure that we respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner as a key part of our customer service strategy
  - g. To provide a framework for the delivery of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure
6. The Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy will not be used to deal with staff disciplinary issues or grievance issues. There are separate policies in place to cover these areas. In some instances, a reported complaint might lead to an investigation under a separate policy. In this case the customer will be kept informed as appropriate.
7. Buckinghamshire College Group does not entertain anonymous complaints in all but the most exceptional of circumstances.

8. Policy on malicious complaints – Buckinghamshire College Group takes the issue of malicious complaints very seriously. If, after investigation, a complaint is considered to have been made maliciously and/or without foundation then this could, if appropriate, result in disciplinary action against the person making the complaint.

9. All complaints and compliments are associated with Buckinghamshire College Group and not with individual members of staff. This point is to be read in conjunction with point 5.

10. The objective of the complaints process is to investigate and improve the services that we offer and to be accountable to our customers and stakeholders. The policy of Buckinghamshire College Group is to respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner. All complaints will be treated seriously.

11. The Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure below will detail minimum expectations, timelines, responsibilities and the agreed process for responding to Customer feedback.

12. All complaints will be dealt with fairly and decisions will be made on the balance of probabilities.

13. Any customer who feels that the College has not dealt effectively with their complaint has the option to take up the complaint with the Education Skills Funding Agency via the 'Complaints against Providers' process. Customers will be informed of this process once the College process is exhausted.

14. Higher Education complaints – complainants should approach the College first with their complaint. Depending on the circumstances of the complaint they could be advised to make their complaint through the complaints procedure of the relevant University. In this instance the College will provide details of the University's procedure.

15. For any complaint relating to Higher Education customers have the option to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator after the relevant University's complaints procedure has been exhausted.

## **PROCEDURE FOR COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS**

The objective of this procedure is to:

1. Implement the above compliments, comments and complaints policy for the College
2. Ensure that the College responds to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner as a key part of our customer service strategy
3. Welcome feedback as an opportunity to improve the services that we offer
4. Encourage a culture of openness around compliments / comments / complaints
5. To direct that complaints should be resolved:
  - as quickly as possible
  - as close to the point of delivery as possible
  - fairly (for all parties)
  - with the minimum of inconvenience to the Complainant
  - in a personal way, observing best practice for customer service

6. To ensure that customer compliments, comments and complaints are used to develop overall improvements to the way that we work.

All compliments, comments and complaints will be treated seriously but should be dealt with informally in the first instance whenever possible and addressed at the point of delivery.

### **Compliments and Comments**

All compliments and comments should be properly acknowledged and the customer thanked for their feedback.

- Compliments or comments received in writing should be acknowledged in writing
- Whoever receives a compliment or comment should pass it on to the Curriculum Manager or Faculty Director/Head of Department and cc to the Executive Director Business Development and Marketing in order that the senior managers in the College can understand customer feedback and drive recognition of good performance.

### **Complaints**

#### **Informal Complaints - Complaint handling formula**

All team members are involved in customer service so may be involved in handling informal complaints. Team members dealing with a complaint should work to the following simple formula:

1. Listen
2. Ask questions
3. AGREE a solution – check satisfaction
4. Implement the solution – NOW
5. Follow up and check satisfaction

The aim should be to deal with less significant issues in an informal way at the point of service delivery to ensure a speedy resolution.

#### **Internal Customers – students**

In the first instance, students should discuss their complaint with their Tutor. Many problems can be resolved with this direct interaction. If an immediate resolution is not possible, or the student is not satisfied with the outcome, they should inform their Tutor or another member of the staff team who will ensure that the matter is investigated informally. The member of staff will try to identify an informal solution to the problem.

If the student is not satisfied with the proposed informal solution, they may choose to then make a formal complaint to the Curriculum Manager responsible for their course.

If a student needs help in making a formal complaint, this can be obtained either through Reception, through the Learning Centre or by contacting a member of the Student Services Team.

Higher Education students should approach the College with any complaint in the first instance. Depending on the circumstances it may be more relevant for the student to complain via the complaints process of the relevant university – in which case College staff should advise the student of this and provide details of the university's procedures.

#### **External Customers**

- External customers are individuals, groups or organisations using College facilities and businesses, organisations or individuals that the College works with or has a business relationship with
- Informal feedback should initially be directed to a member of staff within the area where the complaint is based. Complaints can often be resolved with this direct interaction

- However, if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome then they may choose to then make a formal complaint to the Faculty Director or Head of Department responsible for the area of the complaint.

### **Formal Complaints**

If the customer is not satisfied with the informal resolution to the complaint then the formal complaints process begins. Alternatively, a complaint can immediately be dealt with through the formal process if it is made direct to a member of the Executive and/or it is deemed serious enough to warrant the formal procedure.

The Executive Director Business Development and Marketing is responsible for logging and monitoring complaints but will not usually deal directly with complaints. The College's policy is that complaints should be dealt with as close to the source of the complaint as possible – usually by manager or head of the department about which the complaint has been made.

- A formal complaint is one received in writing via letter or email or made over the telephone to a member of Executive or one of their PAs. Alternatively, a complaint initially dealt with informally can be made formal at the request of the customer or if it cannot be resolved informally. The College will not ask customers to put complaints in writing in order to trigger the formal complaints process
- Formal complaints must be logged, investigated and the outcome recorded. The Executive Director Business Development and Marketing is responsible for monitoring complaints so must be made aware of formal complaints as soon as they are received.
- Scanned/emailed copies of all complaints should be sent to the Executive Director Business Development and Marketing (EDBDM) as soon as they are received
- Notes of any telephone conversations should be taken and copies kept of all correspondence by the compliant owner.

### **Stage 1 – Receipt of complaint/processing/immediate response**

- Once the complaint has been received by the EDBDM it is forwarded IMMEDIATELY (within 2 working hours) to the Curriculum Manager or Head of Department responsible. Email should be used whenever possible.
- This person then becomes the owner of the complaint
- The complaint owner should contact the customer IMMEDIATELY (within 2 working hours or by 24 hours at the latest), by telephone if possible, to explain that they are dealing with the complaint, to give the customer their contact details and to agree the timeframe for resolution.

### **Stage 2 – Investigation/Agreement of resolution/Confirmation of resolution**

The complaint owner takes the following action:

- Investigate the complaint by interviewing staff or customers as necessary. Notes should be taken of phone calls and meetings
- Consult with their line manager
- Agree the resolution with the customer within two working days of receipt of the complaint or within the previously agreed timeline
- Resolution should be presented/agreed in person where possible or, failing that, by telephone. Resolution should only be presented in writing if no other contact details are available or if specifically requested by the complainant
- The target timeframe to agree a resolution to a complaint with all customers is **within two working days of receipt**. This may not be possible in complex cases, in which case the customer should be informed of the proposed timeframe to agree a resolution

If the customer is satisfied:

- Inform the EDBDM of the agreed resolution and follow up in writing to the customer to confirm it within a further 5 working days

### **Stage 3 – Escalation**

If the customer remains dissatisfied following the response from the manager the complaint is escalated to the relevant Faculty Director (FD) or Business Support Director.

- FD is now the complaint owner and will do the following:
- FD will contact the customer IMMEDIATELY to explain that they are now dealing with the complaint and to agree the next step – in most cases this will be a face-to-face meeting
- FD will write to the customer to confirm that they are dealing with the complaint and to provide a copy of the Buckinghamshire College Group Compliments, Comment and Complaints Procedure
- FD to meet with the customer or speak on the telephone and agree a solution/give a response
- Follow-up in writing

### **Stage 4 – Appeal**

In exceptional circumstances if the customer is still not satisfied after the previous steps they may appeal in writing. The appeal will be dealt with by an appropriate member of the Executive within 14 days. The Exec member will consult with colleagues who have been involved in the complaint, meet with the complainant to hear the appeal and give a final decision.

### **Stage 5 – Final Appeal**

In very exceptional circumstances if the customer is still not satisfied after the previous steps then the matter can be appealed to the Principal in writing within a further 14 days.

Any customer who feels that the College has not dealt effectively with their complaint has the option to take up the complaint with the Education and Skills Funding Agency via the 'Complaints against Providers' process. A copy of this process is available for customers from the Learning Centre or from Reception and customers will be informed of this process once the College process is exhausted.

Any Higher Education student who is still unhappy after all procedures have been exhausted (whether those of the College or of the relevant university) can choose to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator:

Any complaint to the OIA must be submitted within 3 months of the Completion of Procedures letter being received by the student (see page 8). The OIA will not normally consider complaints which have not followed the University's procedures through all stages, including appeal.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education may be contacted at:

Office of the Independent Adjudicator  
Second Floor  
Abbey Gate  
57 – 75 Kings Road  
READING  
RG1 3AB  
Tel: 0118 959 9813  
Email: [enquiries@oiahe.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@oiahe.org.uk)

Website: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

### **General Notes on formal complaint handling process**

- All complaints will be considered as complaints against Buckinghamshire College Group and not against individual members of staff
- Every communication either from the complainant or from the College should be copied to the EDBDM
- Notes will be kept of meetings, all telephone calls will be logged and this information will be copied to the EDBDM
- The appropriate manager will give a full written response to the complaint within 7 working days of receipt wherever possible
- When this is not possible explanation will be given in writing to the customer within ten days with a proposed schedule for response
- The final response should include an explanation to the customer of how to take their complaint further, if necessary
- All complaints will be treated as confidential and will be handled with sensitivity by the investigating manager

### **Monitoring and Quality Assurance**

The Executive Director Business Development and Marketing will present regular updates on live complaints to the Executive and an annual report for the Buckinghamshire College Group Corporation summarising the complaints during the year. This will be based on an analysis of the year's complaints organised by curriculum area, category of complaint, and type of complainant. The Executive will be responsible for investigating and responding to any queries arising from the annual report to the Corporation.

*This procedure cross-references with the following documents:*

- *The Buckinghamshire College Group Compliments, Comments and Complaints Flowchart (internal document)*

*Copies of all documents can be obtained by contacting Reception or the Learning Centre or by accessing the Buckinghamshire College Group Website or Cloud.*

**Checklist:**

**Impact on Students/Staff:** This document outlines the procedure for complaints from all customers including students

**Impact on Diversity:** This procedure will be applied equally and fairly and it sets out a process that enables everyone to bring forward any complaint or comment or compliment that they might have

**Impact on PREVENT:** Outlines the procedure for making comments, complaints and compliments

**Impact on Health & Safety:** Outlines the procedure for making comments, complaints and compliments

**Impact on Data Protection/Freedom of Information:** Outlines the procedure for making comments, complaints and compliments and FoI requests

**Link with Strategic Plan:** helping to achieve excellence

**Communication/Consultation Plan:** This procedure is well embedded and is available on Cloud. The updated policy will be emailed to all managers

**Process of review:** Procedure is reviewed annually based on the compliments/comments/complaint received and any customer feedback regarding the process and policy.

**Process of review of effectiveness:** As above

**Legal authority:** None

**Responsibility for maintaining this policy rests with:** Executive Director Business Development and Marketing

**Links to other policies:** Customer Complaint Process Flowchart