

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Relating to: Quality

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Complaints Policy and Procedure

Purpose:

To inform complainants of the procedure for dealing with informal and formal complaints.

Scope:

St Helens College, Knowsley Community College, University Centre St Helens, and subcontracted provision; applicants, students, apprentices, parents of students under 18 years old, employers, and members of the general public.

This procedure is the responsibility of the Vice Principal – Quality and Student Experience.

Academic appeals are not a part of this policy or procedure. Please refer to the College's Further Education or Higher Education academic appeal policies.

1.0 Introduction

St Helens College including Knowsley Community College and University Centre St Helens (the College), is committed to providing high quality services for all our students, prospective students, employers and all stakeholders or members of the College community.

The College operates a staged complaint procedure through which it aims to resolve all concerns quickly and effectively. This document details that Complaint Procedure.

All complaints will be taken seriously, received courteously and in confidence and dealt with impartially. Complaints will be investigated without prejudice to the complainant, with confidential support where required to enable the complaint to be put into writing or any other medium the complainant requires, e.g., Braille/audio.

Advice and support on how to raise a complaint, either informally or formally, assistance in completing the form or assistance during the complaint process, can be obtained by contacting College reception services either in person or by telephone on 01744 733766. Alternatively, please contact complaints@sthelens.ac.uk.

2.0 Policy Statement

- The College will ensure that applicants and students are not treated less favourably following their complaint.
- The College will identify actions from complaints received to improve and develop its services.
- The College will monitor Equality and Diversity information via the Formal Complaint Form, for example, gender and ethnicity, to help in ensuring that all people are treated fairly.
- The College will not accept or act upon anonymous complaints.
- If a complaint is received via any Social Media platform, the complainant will be advised to follow the College's Complaint Procedure. We reserve the right to remove complaints posted on a public facing platform.
- The College's decision will be communicated to the complainant using the complainant's preferred method of contact.
- The Quality Improvement Team will continuously monitor a complaint until the issue has been resolved.
- Once a complaint has been fully investigated and the outcome communicated to the complainant, the complaint will be recorded as 'closed'.
- Malicious complaints received in any form from students may result in disciplinary action according to college policies.
- In order to help us to investigate and resolve any area of dissatisfaction, the complainant should notify the College of their concern **at Stage 1 [Informal]** immediately and **within one month** of the issue first occurring.
- Complaints regarding the refusal of an offer of a place at the College should be made within two weeks from the date of the rejection letter.
- Complaints made **at Stage 2 [Formal]** must be made **within one month** of exhausting Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure and complaints made **at Stage 3 [Appeal]** must be made **within one month** of exhausting Stage 2 of the complaint procedure.
- Complainants should be aware that all College staff have the right to work in a pleasant and safe environment and any violent or abusive behaviour towards them will not be tolerated.

3.0 Responsibility

- Overall responsibility for this policy and procedure lies with the Vice Principal – Quality and Student Experience.
- Day-to-day responsibility for the implementation of this procedure rests with the Head of Quality Improvement.
- All staff have a responsibility to try to resolve informal complaints prior to complainants invoking the formal complaints procedure.
- All staff have a responsibility to forward formal complaints to the Head of Quality Improvement, including copies of any correspondence issued at Stages 1 and 2.

- The Quality Officer has a duty to maintain a central file for the complaint which contains a copy of the original complaint, records of meetings, correspondence and other evidence used to resolve the complaint at Stage 2.
- All middle leaders e.g., Head of School, Head of Department, as well as non-executive members of the senior leadership team, can be called upon to investigate a formal complaint.
- All non-executive members of the senior leadership team can be called upon to consider an appeal.

4.0 Investigating Formal Complaints

- Upon receipt of a formal complaint, the Head of Quality Improvement will appoint an independent manager to investigate the complaint.
- The investigating manager will carry out a full and thorough investigation into the complaint, making use of all available evidence.
- Upon completion of the investigation, the investigating manager will complete an investigation report and make recommendations to the Head of Quality Improvement
- The Head of Quality Improvement will communicate the outcome to the complainant and all relevant internal stakeholders.
- The Head of Quality Improvement will ensure that all recommendations are considered and implemented, as appropriate.

5.0 Monitoring of Complaints

The College monitors all complaints carefully. A bi-annual report on formal complaints is produced and shared with the Senior Leadership Team, detailing issues raised, areas of concern, timeliness of resolution and any subsequent actions.

In addition, the College reports annually to the Governing Body on the operation of the Complaint Procedure and the nature of complaints.

Informal Complaints

6.0 Complaints from Employers

If you are dissatisfied, or have any concerns with the service provided by the College, please raise your concerns with the Commercial Director and Managing Director of Waterside Training, jcallaghan@sthelens.ac.uk

Once you have raised an issue of concern, you will receive an initial response within five working days. If you are dissatisfied with the resolution from the informal

procedure, then the issue should be raised formally using the Formal Complaints Process (see section 12).

7.0 Complaints from General Public

If you are a member of the public or other stakeholder of the College, you should in the first instance raise your concern directly in writing to complaints@sthelens.ac.uk.

Advice and initial assistance are also available at the Reception Services of our main campuses.

- Once you have raised an issue of concern, you will receive an initial response within 10 working days.
- If you are dissatisfied with the resolution from this informal procedure, then please follow the Formal Complaints procedure. (See section 12).

8.0 Complaints Against the Principal

Complaints regarding the Principal or any other member of the Senior Leadership Team should be directed to the Director of Governance, by emailing governance@sthelens.ac.uk

9.0 Complaints against the Corporation

The College has a specific policy for managing complaints against members of the Corporation or the Governance Director. The policy is available on the College website.

10.0 Public Interest Complaints

Should a complaint be raised that the individual believes is in the public interest, in relation to illegal, improper, or unethical conduct (Whistleblowing), they may raise the issue under the College's Speak Up Policy, which is available on the College website.

Complaints Process

11.0 Stage 1 - Informal

11.1 Applicants – Right to appeal admissions decisions and request a review of their application

Applicants wishing to appeal the decision of a rejection of an offer of a place should follow the informal complaints process by first raising the appeal with the relevant Head of School.

Support and assistance on directing your appeal to the relevant person can be provided by contacting the reception services of the College either in person, by telephone on 01744 733766, or via email on enquire@sthelens.ac.uk

Applicants to Higher Education programmes wishing to appeal their offer of a place should contact the HE Admissions Team in the first instance, by emailing enquire@sthelens.ac.uk

If you are still unhappy with the outcome of this process, please follow the formal complaints procedure and complete the Formal Complaints Form.

11.2 Stage 1 Informal - All Students

Rather than let an issue of concern, or an area of dissatisfaction, become a complaint, we hope that you will try to resolve your issue promptly by:

- Initially directing your concerns to your Progress Coach or Curriculum Tutors, progressing to the relevant Head of School if not resolved at that level.
- Alternatively, you can raise any concerns through the Student Council via your Student Representative, where you can raise general concerns or issues from groups of students.

Once you have raised an issue of concern, the College will respond initially within 10 working days.

If you are dissatisfied with the resolution from the informal procedure, then the issue should be raised formally following the Formal Complaint process (see section 12 below).

12.0 Stage 2 - Formal

The College appreciates that there may be occasions when the above process may not produce a satisfactory outcome and a more formal approach may be necessary.

Where it has not been possible to resolve matters to your satisfaction under **Stage 1 – Informal**, you should complete a Formal Complaint Form and submit this to the Quality Improvement Team, who will oversee the complaint process; email quality@sthelens.ac.uk

The Formal Complaint Form is available from Reception, or on the following websites www.sthelens.ac.uk or www.knowsleycollege.ac.uk

A Formal Complaint Form should be completed with as much detail as possible, but most importantly include your full name, date of birth, and contact details. If the form is completed on behalf of a complainant, then the form must include full contact details of the complainant's representative.

The form should be completed outlining your concerns as clearly and in as much detail as you can. Please include your name and address, dates, locations, and witnesses as appropriate. You should outline any previous unsuccessful attempts at resolution and what reasonable steps should be taken to resolve your complaint.

All complaints received will be initially assessed by the Head of Quality Improvement and recorded centrally. All complaints will be acknowledged within five working days.

If required, the complaint will be forwarded to a relevant manager for investigation.

In all cases, formal complaints will be investigated by a member of staff not directly connected with the complaint.

An investigating manager will investigate thoroughly and report their findings. A written response will be provided to the complainant, detailing the outcome of the investigation and, if applicable, any corrective action that the College intends to take.

The investigation will normally be completed **within 10 working days** following the formal acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint. Where this timescale is not feasible, the College will make the complainant aware of progress as an interim measure.

The complainant can normally expect to receive the written outcome of the process in writing within 10 working days of the College confirming receipt of the complaint, a copy of which will be sent to the Quality Officer for recording centrally.

13.0 Stage 3 – Appeal Stage

Appeals against the outcome of a Stage 2 **[Formal]** complaint can only be made on the following grounds:

1. That new and compelling evidence has come to light that was not originally considered.
2. That the College has not followed its own procedure.

Your appeal must be made in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 response and should detail the reason for your appeal.

Appeals against the decision outcome at Stage 2 should be submitted in writing and addressed to Patricia Maloney, PA to the Principalship; email pmaloney@knowsleycollege.ac.uk

Complaint appeals will be heard in accordance with the Complaint Appeal Procedure (see section 14)

Complaint Appeal Procedure

14.0 Complaint Appeal Process

All appeals will be considered by a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

The relevant senior leader will decide whether to review the complaint by examining the associated paperwork and evidence collected, or whether to arrange a meeting with the complainant.

All appeals will be received courteously and in confidence. If appropriate, notification of an appeal meeting will be made in writing to the complainant giving adequate notice. The meeting will also be attended by a manager who has not previously been involved in the complaint.

The complainant is entitled to receive a copy of the procedure on request and to have the procedure explained prior to the appeal.

The outcome of the appeal will be confirmed in writing to the complainant, normally within 10 working days, and a copy will be sent to the Quality Officer for recording centrally.

The outcome of the appeal is final. Please refer to Stage 4 below, if necessary.

15.0 Stage 4 - Students and Employers

15.1 Students on Study Programmes aged 16-18 and Adults on Funded Courses

If your concern is not resolved at Stage 3, [Appeal] and you are still unhappy, you may appeal to either the relevant Awarding Organisation or to the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Before you can do this, you must have exhausted all 3 stages of the College's Complaint Procedure. If your concern reaches this stage, we will provide you with full information on how to proceed.

The contact address for the ESFA is:

The Office of the Chief Executive
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT
Complaints.esfa@education.gov.uk

The College can provide contact details for an awarding organisation upon request at the appropriate stage.

15.2 University Centre St Helens Students

For quality of learning complaints, if your concern is not resolved at Stage 3 [Appeal], and you are on a course validated by one of our university partners, and, if after exhausting all 3 stages of the College's Complaint Procedure you remain dissatisfied, you have the right to submit your complaint to the relevant validating university partner.

You can contact the validating university partner for advice and support at any stage of your complaint.

Details of the complaint policy and procedures for your relevant validating university partner will be available on their respective websites, or upon request directly from them.

For service-related complaints, you also have the right to appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). Before you can do this, you must have exhausted all 3 stages of the College's Complaint Procedure.

The address for the OIA is:

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
Second Floor
Abbey Gate
57-75 Kings Road
Reading
Berkshire RG1 3AB
Tel: 0118 959 9814
Email: enquiries@oiahe.org.uk
Website: <http://www.oiahe.org.uk>