

# Complaints Policy

## 1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. The College aims to provide a high quality service to all Service Users. The College promotes a culture that is responsive to feedback, both positive and negative. We actively encourage comments about our services and acknowledge them as a valuable source of information that we can use to improve the quality of our provision to learners and other users.
- 1.2. Occasionally situations may arise when individuals are not content with aspects of the service they are receiving or the way they are being treated. Service Users are therefore entitled to complain if they feel that the quality of any service is inadequate, or if they feel that they have encountered unfairness, prejudice or harassment.
- 1.3. We will accept complaints brought by third parties (but not normally a legal advisor) as long as the customer has given their written personal consent.

## 2. Reason For The Policy

- 2.1. The policy has been developed to ensure that all Service Users are aware of the complaints procedures and that these processes are widely known and understood.
- 2.2. The procedures ensure that complaints are considered and resolved in a timely, fair, consistent and equitable manner.
- 2.3. The policy applies to all members of the College community but does not replace College procedures for, staff grievances/capability/disciplinary, academic appeals and student disciplinary action: those procedures should be used where appropriate.

## 3. Policy Objectives

- 3.1. To encourage complainants to resolve their dissatisfaction through open and informal procedures in the first instance.
- 3.2. To provide clear procedures for Service Users to raise their comments in a way that is free from intimidation and excessive bureaucracy.
- 3.3. To clearly identify the process to be followed by the appropriate personnel in dealing with the issue/complaint.
- 3.4. To indicate actions which should be taken; that any action taken is necessary, fair and consistent and that Service Users are provided with adequate information concerning reasons for action and improvement sought (if appropriate).
- 3.5. To ensure that privacy and confidentiality is respected in dealing with a complaint.
- 3.6. To monitor complaints by periodically reporting to the Senior Leadership Team and the Governors, thereby improving the quality of the service provided.

## 4. Policy

### Complaints Procedures for Service Users

The procedure aims to help us resolve problems successfully at the first time of asking. We want quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with local, early resolution by capable, well-trained staff.

*(Staff to refer to separate more detailed Complaints Handling Procedures (CHP))*

If you are a student of the College you can access advocacy through the College Information and Guidance Service or the Student Union.

Policy Title:	Complaints Policy	Policy Owner:	Director of Curriculum Improvement and Students
Status:	FINAL	Approval Date:	December 2015
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Yes - EIA Date:			

Anyone who receives, requests or is affected by our services can make a complaint.

You may be accompanied throughout the process by a friend/family member or other suitable representative. Sometimes a customer may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own.

You will be advised to report any complaints of a criminal nature to the Police for investigation.

You will not suffer any disadvantage as a result of lodging a complaint in good faith. However, disciplinary proceedings may be instigated against you if the complaint is found to be as a result of malicious intent.

There are two Stages of complaint and our aim is to deal with them as quickly and informally as possible and for you to feel satisfied with the outcome.

#### 4.1. Complaints

We value all complaints. This means we treat all complaints seriously including anonymous ones and will take action to consider them further, wherever it is proper to do so. Generally, we will consider an anonymous complaint if it gives enough information for us to make further enquiries. Failing this, we may decide not to pursue it. A decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by a responsible senior manager.

#### 4.2 Stage 1 – Frontline Resolution

Frontline resolution aims to quickly resolve straightforward complaints that require little or no investigation. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage unless they are the subject of the complaint or have a clear conflict in the matter. In this instance the complaint should be handed to a first line manager within the area for resolution.

4.2.1. The main principle is to seek early resolution - resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service as possible. This may mean a face-to-face discussion with the customer, or asking a suitable member of staff to deal directly with the complaint.

4.2.2. Frontline resolution must be completed within **five working days**, although in practice we would often expect to resolve the complaint much sooner.

4.2.3. Decisions can be given face to face or by telephone. It is not necessary that the customer is advised in writing. However, as with all complaints a full and accurate record of the decision will be recorded on the Performance and Delivery office

#### 4.3 Stage 2 - Investigation

All formal complaints will be dealt with by the Performance and Delivery department who will acknowledge receipt within 2 working days. The Performance and Delivery will then inform the relevant manager of the details of the complaint. If it is not appropriate for the manager of the area concerned to investigate the complaint then an investigating officer will be appointed.

4.3.1 The relevant manager/investigating officer will respond to the complainant in writing within 15 working days explaining what has happened as a result of the complaint. Where this involves a member of staff, specific detail of any action taken will not be made available to the complainant. This is to ensure that members of staff are afforded appropriate dignity at work and that confidentiality has been observed.

4.3.2 If the complaint requires further investigation and cannot be resolved within the initial timeframe given then the manager/investigating officer shall keep the complainant informed of the progress to date.

4.3.3 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response from the manager/investigating officer because they believe the procedures haven't been correctly followed or believe the decision is unreasonable in the face of the evidence, then they can appeal by writing to the Principal, within 5 working days of receiving the response. Complaints will be deemed closed if an appeal is not received within this timescale.

4.3.4 The Principal will review the complaint, examine the evidence and reach a final decision. The decision will be confirmed in writing within 10 working days of the review. The principal's decision will be final.

#### 4.4 Stage 3 - Independent External Review

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the response then they can appeal by writing to:

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#### **4.5 Complaints against the Principal or Members of the Governing Body**

Complaints against the Principal should be addressed to the Chair of the Governors c/o the Clerk to the Governors. Complaints against the Governing Body should also be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors

#### **4.6 Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Performance and Delivery department will maintain confidential records of all complaints, appeals and outcomes and this information will feed into the College Quality Improvement Plan. The Performance and Delivery department will produce reports for analysis by the College Management Team and subsequent submission to the Governors

### **5 Definitions**

- 5.1 The College defines a complaint as 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made about the standard of service, actions or lack of actions by the College or its staff affecting an individual customer or a group of customers'
- 5.2 The College defines the complainant as 'a person making the complaint or on behalf of whom the complaint is being made by an advocate/representative'.

### **6 Policy Owner**

Director of Curriculum Improvement and Students

### **7 Who Will Need To Know About This Policy**

- 7.1 All staff
- 7.2 All students (for Higher Education students, please refer to the separate Higher Education Student Complaints Policy)
- 7.3 All Service Users

### **8 Responsibility**

- 8.1 All College staff have a responsibility for receiving complaints, treating them seriously and dealing with them promptly and courteously in accordance with the policy.
- 8.2 Directors and Managers have a responsibility for resolving a complaint, and leading or contributing to an investigation into a complaint when this is considered appropriate.
- 8.3 The College Principal is responsible to review any unresolved complaints.

### **9 Related Policies & Procedures**

- Higher Education Student Complaints Policy
- Student Disciplinary Policy
- Staff Disciplinary Policy
- Staff Grievance Procedure
- Complaints Handling Procedures
- Weymouth College Assessment Appeals Procedure (Guide for Students)

### **10 History**

This policy was adopted and approved: 9<sup>th</sup> December 2015

Signed: *Nigel Evans*

Date: *15 December 2015*

Nigel Evans, Interim Principal

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