



HE15 – Higher Education (HE) Students Complaints Policy

Policy Author	Head of HE	Policy Owner:	Vice Principal Curriculum
Approval Date:	March 2021	Review Date:	March 2023
Purpose of the Policy <p>The policy has been developed to ensure that all Higher Education students are aware of the Weymouth College compliments and complaints procedures and where appropriate the processes of the partner university which is responsible for their programme of study.</p> <p>The procedures ensure that complaints are considered and resolved in a timely, fair, consistent and equitable manner.</p> <p>The complaints procedure is not designed to be used to remedy minor concerns about day-to-day operational matters which typically would be remedied through less formal procedures.</p> <p>This policy only applies to students studying on a Higher Education programme at Weymouth College. All other students and service users should refer to the separate Weymouth College Complaints Policy.</p>			



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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. Higher Education students (including recent graduates) 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.** These policy and procedures are for use when a student wishes to make a complaint. However, sometimes a student may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own. We will accept complaints brought by third parties (but not normally a legal advisor) as long as the student has given their written personal consent.
- 1.4.** Students should submit complaints within 90 days of the issue they wish to complain about when events are clear in the minds of those involved, and when evidence may be more readily available. Complaints submitted more than 90 days after the issue(s) occurred be considered only in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances are those in which the student is able to demonstrate good reason for not submitting the complaint earlier.
- 1.5.** This policy should be read in conjunction with the supporting Weymouth College Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP).

2. Policy Objectives

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



3. Policy

Procedures for Higher Education students for making Complaints about Courses or Other College Services

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

You may be accompanied throughout the process by a friend/family member or other suitable representative.

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.

It is important that you seek resolution as soon as is reasonably practicable, and normally within **20 working days** of the occurrence of the problem. This increases the possibility of sorting out the problem quickly.

There are two categories of complaint (informal (frontline resolution) and formal).

Our aim is to deal with informal complaints as quickly as possible and for you to feel satisfied with the outcome.

For HE students who are on a course with University of Plymouth they should only refer to Stage 1 of this policy to resolve any straightforward complaints that may arise. However, if the complaint is about a service issue ie facilities, resources etc the student should follow the College complaints procedure.

3.1. 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.

3.2. Stage 1 – Informal (Frontline Resolution)

Frontline resolution aims to quickly resolve straightforward complaints. In this instance the complaint should be handed to a first line manager within the area for resolution investigation. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage unless they are the subject of the complaint.

3.2.1. 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 student, or asking a suitable member of staff to deal directly with the complaint.

3.2.2. Frontline resolution must be completed within **5 working days**, although in practice we would often expect to resolve the complaint much sooner.

3.2.3. Decisions can be given face to face or by telephone. It is not necessary that the student is advised in writing. However, as with all complaints a full and accurate record of the decision will be recorded by the Quality of Education Team.

Please see Appendix 1 for a flow chart of how to proceed if you are a student following a University of Plymouth course at Weymouth College and you wish to proceed to a formal complaint stage.

Students following a Pearson EDEXCEL programme or City and Guilds will need to follow Stage 2 and Stage 3 below.

3.3. Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

All formal complaints will be dealt with by the Quality of Education Department who will acknowledge receipt within 2 working days. The Quality of Education Team 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.

3.3.1. 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.

3.3.2. 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.

3.4. Stage 3 - Independent External Review

If the student is dissatisfied with the response from the manager/investigating officer because they believe the procedures have not been correctly followed or believe the decision is unreasonable in the face of the evidence, then they can appeal by writing to:

The OIA (Office of the Independent Adjudicator) <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>

3.5. Complaints against the Principal or Chief Executive Officer or Members of the Governing Body

Complaints against the Principal or Chief Executive Officer 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.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Quality of Education will maintain confidential records of all complaints, appeals and outcomes and this information will feed into the College Quality Improvement



Plan. The Quality of Education Department will produce reports for analysis by the College Management Team and subsequent submission to the Governors.

4. Responsibility

- 4.1. All College staff have a responsibility for receiving complaints, treating them seriously and dealing with them promptly and courteously in accordance with the policy.
- 4.2. 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.
- 4.3. The College Principal is responsible to review any unresolved complaints.
- 4.4. The partner university according to their relevant policies and procedures.

Definitions:	<p>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’.</p> <p>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’.</p>	Who Needs to Know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff teaching on Higher Education Programmes • All Higher Education Students
Related Policies and Procedures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Disciplinary Policy • Staff Disciplinary Policy • Staff Grievance Procedure • Complaints Procedures • HE Appeals Policy for Level 4 & 5 (Non University) • University of Plymouth Complaints Procedure • University of Plymouth Policy for Academic Appeals (taught & research) 	Approval Date:	March 2021

This policy was approved and adopted by:

Julia Howe

**Julia Howe
Interim Principal**



Appendix 1

Complaint Procedure for University of Plymouth Students

Stage 1

As a student you should raise any issues or problems with your Tutor or alternative member of staff at Weymouth College. The College will work with you to resolve the issue. If you are not happy with the outcome of this stage, you can raise a formal complaint in writing (Stage 2) with the University using the complaints@plymouth.ac.uk email address.

Students should note that, under OIA rules, the University cannot consider complaints about service issues (facilities, resources etc.) Complaints about service issues should be raised through the College's internal Complaints Procedure.

Stage 1 – Notes

This is an informal step in the complaints process. It is envisaged that either the Tutor or an alternative Weymouth College representative will be able to resolve the issue raised by you and will meet with you to discuss the outcome.

Stage 2

If you wish to raise a formal complaint you need to contact the University's Complaints Office (CO). The CO will contact Weymouth College with details of your complaint and will liaise with the College in order that they can consider the issues raised. The CO can advise the College as to possible solutions that could be offered to address your complaint. Weymouth College will then write to you to address the formal complaint and to offer a resolution.

If you are not happy with the outcome of Stage 2, you can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 with the University at complaints@plymouth.ac.uk where a Stage Three Complaint Review Panel will take place.

Stage 2 – Notes

The University's CO will contact Weymouth College on receipt of your formal complaint and liaise with the College in order that they can consider your issue. The CO will also give advice to the College as to ways to resolve your complaint.

Stage 3

If you are not happy with the outcome of Stage 2, you should write to the CO saying why you are dissatisfied with the response and ask for referral to a Complaint Review Panel will be set up to review your complaint. After the Panel within **10 working days** of receiving your response at Stage 2.

If, following this, you are still not happy with the outcome, your next step would be to take your complaint to the OIA (Office of Independent Adjudicator).

Stage 3 – Notes

The Stage Three Complaint Review Panel is drawn from a pool of Academics, Registrars, and the Student Union. The CO will contact Weymouth College on receipt of the student complaint. The College will then have the opportunity to comment, or to provide a written submission in response to the complaint. The Complaints and Appeals Office will then carry out initial Scrutiny to ensure that the complaint meets the grounds for further consideration at Stage 3. Complaints that meet the grounds will be referred to a Stage 3 Complaint Review Panel. The CO will write to you with the outcome of the panel's decision and notify the College of the Panel's decision.