



Student Complaints Policy

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Complaints

For the purposes of this policy a student complaint, as defined by the OIA, is "an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about an institution's action or lack of action, or about the service provided by or on behalf of the institution."

Feedback

A student may provide feedback which will be useful to the College when reviewing its policies and operations, without invoking this policy. Students are encouraged to provide feedback in a prompt and constructive manner.

Student Complaints Policy

The purpose of this Policy is to set out the College's procedures for:

- bringing matters of dissatisfaction to the attention of the College;
- investigating and responding to those concerns;
- improving services as a result of the concern raised;

Policy Statement

The Complaints Policy is intended to enable any person(s) to bring matters of dissatisfaction or concern to the attention of The College, so that those concerns can be investigated with the aim of reaching a satisfactory resolution and instigating changes which lead to improved services. The College will respond to any complaint fairly and promptly:

- An acknowledgment response will be provided within 2 working days of receipt of the complaint
- A further more detailed response will be made within 10 working days
- A meeting may be offered between the parties involved if appropriate
- An appeal may be made to the Director within 10 working days if the complainant (person making the complaint) is dissatisfied with the outcome they receive
- The appeal will be forwarded to the Chairman if appropriate for final investigation

Information on how to take the complaint further will be provided if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Chairman's final findings or response. This Policy does not replace College procedures for academic appeals or disciplinary action; those procedures should be applied where appropriate. College employees must use the internal Grievance Procedure where the complaint is about another member of staff, but can use this Policy where the complaint is about a service that the College is responsible for.

Why do we need this Policy

Complaints are an important way for the College to be accountable to our students, customers, employees, contractors, and visitors. They also provide valuable prompts to review our organisational performance and the conduct of people that work within and for the College. Effective complaint handling can provide key benefits to The College such as:

- Providing information that can lead to improvements in service and curriculum delivery;
- Resolving issues raised by a person who is dissatisfied in a timely and cost-effective way;
- Improving the reputation and strengthen public confidence in the College's administrative processes where complaints are handled properly;

What constitutes Grounds of Appeal under this Policy

The subject of the complaint should relate specifically to one or more of the following, or comparable issues:

- Failure of the College to meet obligations including those outlined in course/student handbooks;
- Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the College;
- Concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching, supervision or administration including where applicable, that provided by a partner institution. (Please note: normally the student would be expected to follow the partner institution's complaints procedures in the first instance).

- Poor quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided directly by the College;
- Complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing a service on behalf of the College;

Complaints relating to allegations of bullying, harassment or victimisation by members of staff are associated with the Bullying and Harassment Policy and should be addressed to the Head of Development. Student Services will be informed that a complaint has been made and against whom, (no further details will be divulged). Once the Investigation Procedure has been completed, if the student's allegations are proven, then the student may bring a level 2 complaint relating to the impact of the behaviour on their course of study within one month of the date of the outcome letter.

If a student's complaint relates to allegations of bullying, harassment or victimisation by members of staff *and* to matters which are eligible for consideration under the terms of the Student Complaints Policy, the College reserves the right to appoint one investigating officer to consider the issues within the parameters of the published procedures.

Complaints about the behaviour of students towards other students are within the scope of the College Code of Discipline for Students.

What Issues do not constitute grounds for appeal under this Policy

Challenges to the academic judgement of a member of staff . The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) will not interfere with the operation of a College's academic judgement. Dissatisfaction with a mark and/or the academic judgement of the College is not covered by the College's policies. Cases where complaints are upheld and there has been a clear impact on an academic outcome may, however, lead to an academic conclusion e.g. allow a student a further attempt at an assessment.

Cases better suited to consideration under the Academic Appeals Policy, including:

- A concern about a decision made by an academic body regarding student progression, academic assessment and award;
- A concern about a decision made under specific regulations, such as fitness to practise;
- A concern about a College decision relating to an extenuating circumstances claim on the basis of a procedural irregularity;

Where a student raises issues which do not fall neatly into the category of either complaint or academic appeal, the College will notify the student which specific issues will be considered under which specific procedure and direct the student to the alternative appropriate procedure, for example the academic appeals procedure, for the remaining issues.

Roles and Responsibilities

Staff

All College staff have a responsibility for receiving complaints and treating them seriously, and dealing with them promptly and courteously in accordance with the procedure set out below. Staff are also expected to provide any assistance to support a complainant when making a complaint.

Managers

Members of the College Management Team, Heads of Curriculum/Departments, Directors have a responsibility for resolving a complaint, and leading or contributing to an investigation into a complaint when this is considered appropriate.

The Dean/CEO

The College Dean is responsible for resolving complaints which have reached the appeals stage and may nominate any member(s) of the Executive Team who has not previously been involved in the investigation.

Liaison with external agencies

If the investigation uncovers serious criminal behaviour or activity (i.e. theft, racism, and homophobia, physical or verbal abuse, and threats of radicalisation or violent/non violent acts of extremism) then the investigation may be passed over to the Police and/or other appropriate external agencies.

Link to College Values and other Policy Documents

This Policy should be used in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statement
- Appeals Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- PREVENT Policy
- Student Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy
- E-Safety Policy
- Managing Student Behaviour Policy
- Bournemouth and Poole College Mission, Vision and Values
- Freedom of Speech and Expression Policy (Including Visiting Speakers and Events)
- Data Protection Policy
- Acceptable Use IT Policy
- Staff Grievance Procedure

Process and Procedure

Stage 1 (Informal Complaints – up to Head of Development)

- Concerns should be raised in the first instance with the person or area concerned as soon as possible.
- If the issue cannot easily be resolved, the complaint should be directed to the Head of Department.

- Every reasonable effort should be made to resolve the complaint promptly at Head of Department Level.
- If appropriate a meeting will be offered between the complainant and staff from the area they are complaining about to arrive at an agreed resolution.
- If the complaint is about a member of staff it should be referred to their Head of Dept or line manager.
- Verbal complaints to Reception and staff in public areas and requests to meet the Dean should be referred to the Head of Development.
- If the complaint is resolved at this level, it must be recorded on the Curriculum Area/Department complaints log and documentation retained for 2 years. Where the complaint is not satisfactorily resolved at this level, all documentation and notes of discussion must be forwarded to the Head of Development for investigation as a formal complaint.
- Every effort should be made to resolve complaints informally through a dialogue with those immediately concerned. If this does not achieve a satisfactory outcome then the matter will be dealt with formally

Stage 2 (Formal Complaints – up to CEO/Dean Level)

- All formal complaints are systematically referred to the Vice Dean.
- All letters and emails of complaint sent to The Dean will be forwarded to the Vice Dean to action.
- The Vice Dean will nominate the appropriate Manager or Director to investigate.
- The Manager dealing with the complaint will:
 - Dismiss the complaint as unfounded, providing reasons
 - Propose an amicable resolution
 - Uphold or partially uphold the complaint, offer an apology and take appropriate steps to address the issue to avoid a similar problem arising in the future.

All complaints should be dealt with as quickly as possible, with an acknowledgement issued within 2 working days of receiving the complaint and a detailed response following an

investigation provided within 10 working days. Where this is not possible, the complainant will receive regular updates until a final written response outlining the outcome is provided.

If the complaint is about a member of staff and the nominated Manager/Director finds that there are issues of capability or that disciplinary action is required, the Manager/Director should prepare a Management Case on the staff member to include all the evidence and notes taken during the investigation and refer the complaint to the CEO/Dean.

After the internal College processes have been exhausted, complainants have the opportunity to have their complaint independently reviewed by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

Friends and Supporters

Anyone making a complaint may use an advocate/friend (a person who speaks on their behalf) during the process. However, where a complainant is aged 18 years and over, details of the complaint cannot be discussed with any other person unless permission is explicitly given by the complainant.

Recording and Monitoring Complaints

All formal complaints are recorded by the Quality Department and are scrutinised on Student Support Manager for any element of actual or potential discrimination. Any such findings are recorded and reported to the Senior Management and the Board of Directors in the annual report. The complaints received are analysed and regularly reported on with the actions for improvement monitored through the Performance Review Board. Recommendations resulting from investigations will be formally recorded and monitored by the Student Support Manager to ensure that all actions are clearly owned and fulfilled. Any actions that are not fulfilled by the person responsible will be escalated to the relevant line manager.

Principles of this Policy

Complaints should be treated seriously and students must not suffer any disadvantage or recrimination as a result of making a complaint in good faith. However, it is expected that students or people communicating on behalf of a student will conduct themselves responsibly and treat the process and those members of the College involved in the process with respect at all times.

In all cases, it is desirable that complaints are resolved informally and quickly between the relevant parties, and that the formal process is only started if that fails. Evidence of an attempt at informal resolution will be required.

Mediation can be a useful means of resolving matters of complaint where the parties involved are willing to engage voluntarily in the process in an attempt to work things out. The College may make an offer of mediation to students at any stage of the Complaint Procedure.

Complaints must be substantiated with evidence, expressed in clear and succinct English and submitted within prescribed timescales.

Complaints submitted outside of the timescales stipulated in the procedure will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances and where there is good reason, supported by evidence, for the late submission.

The College is committed to ensuring that complaints are handled in accordance with its published procedure. Occasionally, it may be sensible for the College to deviate from procedure if strict adherence to it could give rise to perceptions of prejudice or bias.

Complaints form part of the College's process of quality review and improvement and are considered as providing valuable feedback rather than criticism. We will widely publicise information about procedures to students and staff through our website, Moodle, staff and student handbooks.

Students will be notified early in the process if the remedy sought within the complaint is beyond the power of the College to deliver.

It is important for students to note that the Office of the Independent Adjudicator cannot consider matters which are or which have been the subject of court proceedings. Similarly, the College reserves the right to decline, suspend or to discontinue a complaint under the Student Complaint Procedure, in the event that legal proceedings are commenced and the claim concerns the same subject matter as the complaint.

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