

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

**For Higher Education Course related complaints
Please see separate Policy & Procedures and Guidance Notes**

**For complaints relating to Adult Education and Training provision funded by Greater
Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)
Please see separate Policy & Procedures and Guidance Notes**

1. Introduction

Bolton College welcomes feedback from students, employers and members of the public about courses, services, facilities and other matters for which the College is responsible. All formal complaints will be fully investigated sensitively and our aim is to respond quickly, positively and to reach an outcome that is satisfactory and fair for all concerned. The information gained as a result of these investigations will be used in the pursuit of corrective action and/or continual improvement and also gives us the opportunity to make any necessary adjustments to our systems and processes.

This policy aims to ensure that our responsibilities to protect children and vulnerable adults are met and any complaint received which triggers a safeguarding issue will be passed immediately to the designated safeguarding officer.

There are a number of informal channels through which most problems can be resolved. However, if an individual feels it is necessary, after following the informal route, to pursue a complaint formally, they can be assured that we will treat it seriously and impartially.

2. Informal Complaint

An informal complaint is a matter which an individual wishes to raise with a member of College staff without using the formal complaint process. Issues are usually quickly resolved and unlikely to require an in-depth investigation.

If your complaint is course or staff related and prior to making an official complaint we would expect that you have previously followed the informal route and that you have already referred your complaint to one, or all, of the following:-

- Course tutor
- Curriculum leader
- Head of Department

We will only process your complaint if you have already been in discussion with the above and you have been unable through these channels to resolve your complaint. We will as a matter of course refer to these individuals as part of our investigation.

Student Services, any member of our Fairness Team or reception staff may assist in identifying the correct member of staff.

The member of staff will seek to resolve the issue and keep a confidential record of the issue and how it was resolved.

The Student Services Team can assist a learner with making an informal or formal complaint should they require this support.

In the instance that a complainant does not have access to the internet, or may have difficulty completing an online complaint form, Student Services will be happy to assist, or alternatively, telephone the Principalship who will arrange any necessary assistance. This may occur where complainants are based at a hub / Community Learning Centre.

3. Formal Complaint

If your complaint is course or staff related it is expected that you will already have followed the informal complaint route, as detailed in 2 above.

3.1 The College aims to balance the rights of the complainant and those of any person complained against; all parties must be treated with fairness and dignity. If, however, a complaint which is not upheld was found to have been made maliciously, a learner may be subject to the disciplinary procedure.

3.2 Formal complaints may be made in the following way:-

- **A complainant will already have referred their complaint to a tutor, Curriculum Leader, or Head of Area** for the Department which provides the service their complaint refers to and discuss their concerns with them. We would expect that the issue can be resolved at this stage. However, if that is not the case the complainant should then:-

- Complete a Complaint form online at
<http://www.boltoncc.ac.uk/pub/complaint.php>

Or visit the Principalship who will assist in the completion of the online form. Students may visit Student Services for this assistance if required.

3.3 All formal complaints completed online or electronically via Student Services / The Principalship, will automatically be received by the Principalship who will nominate an Investigating Officer requesting that the complaint be investigated within 10 working days. The Investigating Officer will normally be the appropriate departmental Curriculum Leader, Business Manager or Head of Department.

3.4 An acknowledgement will be sent to the complainant, within 3 working days of receiving a complaint, with the name of Investigating Officer to whom the complaint has been passed,

3.5 At this stage the Head of Department and /or Business Manager and appropriate Director will automatically be notified of the complaint

3.6 All complaints regarding a member of staff should be referred to the Human Resources (HR) Department who will advise on a correct course of action

- 3.7 The Investigating Officer will fully investigate the complaint and respond to the complainant, via the Principalship. To resolve the complaint it may be necessary for the Investigating Officer to arrange a meeting with the complainant or discuss the issue by phone or to respond by letter or email.
- 3.8 If a response is not received from the Investigating Officer within the 10 working day period the Deputy Principal will discuss the delay with the appropriate personnel
- 3.9 If a more extensive investigation is required which may be lengthy, the complainant should be informed, with a clear indication of when they can expect to hear from the College again with an outcome.
- 3.10 A letter will be sent to the complainant outlining the responses and resolution to the complaint. The complainant will also be asked at this time if the complaint has been resolved to their satisfaction. The Director will also be made aware at this stage of the response to the complaint.
- 3.11 If there is no response from the complainant within 14 days the complaint will be closed.
- 3.12 Complaints from **higher education students** are referred to the higher education quality leader in conjunction with the relevant head of area. The HE quality leader is charged with ensuring that the complaint is managed in accordance with the requirements of the UK Quality Code and the Office for Independent Adjudicators (OIA) The complaint is closed, when satisfactorily resolved, by the Director of Curriculum and Quality
- 3.13 There are different Policies and Procedures and Guidance Notes available for **higher education** complaints and these are also available on this section of our website.

4. Dissatisfaction with the Initial Resolution of a Formal Complaint

- 4.1 Complainants who are dissatisfied with the initial outcome of the formal complaint should advise the Principalship. The matter will then be passed to the appropriate Director who will be requested to respond to the complainant within 5 working days, if possible.
- 4.2 Further to the investigation and findings of the Director, if the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome the matter will then be passed to the Deputy Principal for resolution, who again will be requested to respond to the complainant within 5 working days, if possible. The Deputy Principal will then make a final decision on the resolution of the complaint and will write to the complainant. This decision is final and no further action will be taken on the complaint and it will be deemed as closed.

If the complainant is a learner whose course is/was funded in whole or in part by GMCA then the final response letter will include a statement identifying their right to complain to GMCA and details of how to do this.

4.3 The College aims to successfully resolve all complaints within 20 working days of the Principalship receiving the details, however, this may be extended where an investigation is complex and will take longer to resolve, or where there are time constraints due to half term holidays / annual leave / college shutdown etc.,

5. Timescales for Making a Complaint

Complaints should be made as soon as possible after the event, action or issue causing dissatisfaction. Complaints from learners no longer attending the College must be received within **3 months** of their course completion date.

6. Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure)

The College has a Public Interest Disclosure Policy which enables staff to raise concerns internally in a confidential fashion about fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, failure to comply with legal obligations or unethical conduct. The full Public Interest Disclosure Policy can be found via the intranet or by contacting the Human Resources Team.

7. Confidentiality

If specific information within a complaint is to be kept confidential, the complainant should make this clear when making the complaint. However, it should be noted that in exceptional circumstances it may be difficult for confidentiality to be respected, e.g. where a criminal offence or potential gross misconduct has been disclosed or if there are any safeguarding concerns. Additionally, the demand for confidentiality may make it difficult for the College to assist the complainant or to resolve the issue in question.

8. Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

It may be that an incident relates to the physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect of someone under the age of 18 or someone who is deemed to be a “vulnerable adult”. Therefore, disclosures of this kind to any members of staff (including the College Counselling Service) may not remain confidential, as the person “at risk” will require protection.

If you wish to report or discuss this type of incident contact any of the following via Reception:

- Eileen Nicholson, Students Service Manager
- Janet Greenwood, Childcare Co-Ordinator
- Jane Marsh, Director of Human Resources
- Mark Burgoyne, Deputy Principal

9. Unreasonably Persistent Complainants

The College has a Policy for dealing with unreasonably persistent complainants. A copy of this policy is available from main reception desks or via the website.

10. Aggressive or Abusive Complaints

The College will not tolerate aggressive behaviour, bad language, racist, sexist or discriminatory comments.

11. Anonymous Complaints

We understand it could be difficult for complainants to make a complaint if they feel it would result in a poorer service or they would feel threatened. However, if complainants do not provide us with a contact name and address/telephone number/e-mail the complaint cannot be processed.

12. Complaints Reporting

The Principalship will write a report routinely for the Senior Management Team providing anonymous details of the number and nature of complaints dealt with during the preceding month. Additionally, a similar annual report for the Quality Standards Committee will be produced.

Programme / Business Area:	Principalship
Prepared By:	PA to the Principal
Approval level: SMT / Exec / Board / Designated Institution	SMT
Reference Number (if applicable):	QU1
This issue Updated:	23rd September 2021
Next Review Date:	23rd September 2022
To be shown on College Website?	Yes