



Quality Procedure

Complaints Procedure

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<i>Approving body</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Policy and Procedure Panel</i>• <i>SLT</i>
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<i>Linked policies and procedures</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Data Protection Policy</i>
<i>Date of next review</i>	<i>May 2028</i>

1. Purpose of this Procedure

- 1.1 Hertford Regional College (HRC) is committed to providing high quality education, training and support. We recognise that, from time to time, learners, apprentices, employers, parents, carers or other stakeholders may be dissatisfied with an aspect of our provision or services.
- 1.2 This Complaints Procedure:
- explains how concerns and complaints can be raised,
 - ensures complaints are handled fairly, consistently and promptly,
 - supports continuous improvement by learning from feedback.
 - The College welcomes complaints as an opportunity to put things right and improve the learner and stakeholder experience.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This procedure applies to complaints relating to:
- the quality of education or training,
 - support services,
 - facilities or resources,
 - staff conduct or behaviour,
 - College services and processes.
- 2.2 It applies to:
- all learners (including apprentices, adults and higher education learners),
 - parents or carers (where the learner is under 18 or under 24 if they are a learner with high needs),

- employers,
- members of the public,
- partners and stakeholders.

2.3 This procedure does not cover:

- academic appeals or assessment decisions (covered by the College's Assessment Procedure),
- safeguarding disclosures (handled under the College's Safeguarding Policy),
- a complaint related to an incident being investigated by the police,
- staff grievances or disciplinary matters (covered by the College's HR procedures).

3. Principles

3.1 The College will ensure that:

- complaints are treated seriously, fairly and impartially,
- complainants are not disadvantaged or treated less favourably as a result of raising a complaint,
- confidentiality is maintained where possible,
- outcomes are communicated clearly and within stated timescales.

4. The Complaints Process

4.1 Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Most concerns can be resolved quickly and informally.

How to raise an informal concern:

- Raise the issue directly with the relevant manager or another relevant member of staff. This may be in person, by email, or by telephone, or:
- ask to speak to the Duty Manager via reception.
Staff will:
 - listen carefully to the concern,
 - attempt to resolve the issue promptly,
 - report back to the complainant on any actions taken.

If the concern is not resolved via the informal process, the complainant may proceed to Stage 2.

4.2 Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

In most cases, formal complaints will only be accepted if all efforts have been taken to resolve the complaint informally in the first instance. If informal resolution is unsuccessful, a formal complaint may be submitted.

Complaints will only be considered within two months of the incident (college closures not counting within this timeframe).

How to make a formal complaint:

- Complete the College's Complaints Form available on the College's website
- Provide details of:
 - the nature of the complaint,
 - relevant dates and individuals,
 - any steps already taken,
 - the outcome sought.

Formal complaints are managed by the Quality Team, who will:

- check the validity of the formal complaint and acknowledge receipt within 7 working days of receiving it.
- assess and allocate it to an appropriate investigating manager if the complaint is valid (if deemed invalid the complainant will be informed along with the reasons for this and the complaint will be closed at this stage),
- ensure the complaint is investigated objectively and fairly.

Investigation: The investigating manager will:

- review relevant evidence,
- speak with involved parties where appropriate,
- reach a reasoned conclusion.

Outcome:

A written response will be provided by the Quality Team, setting out:

- the findings including whether the complaint, or aspects of it, are upheld or not.
- any actions taken or planned,
- the rationale for the decision.

Timescale:

A formal response regarding the outcome of the investigation will normally be issued within 15 working days of acknowledgement of the complaint. Bank holidays and college closures do not count as part of the 15 working days.

Where a complaint cannot be concluded within this timeframe, or there is a delay in the investigation, the complainant will be informed of progress and given the likely date they should receive a written outcome.

4.3 **Stage 3 – Appeal**

The complainant can appeal the outcome of the complaint if they have additional or new evidence that may alter the decision. Details on how to appeal are provided in the outcome letter.

Grounds for appeal:

- new evidence that was not previously available,
- procedural irregularity,
- indisputable evidence that the complaint was not investigated fairly.

The appeal will:

- be reviewed by an independent college manager not previously involved,
- focus on the appeal grounds rather than reinvestigating the entire complaint.

Timescale:

The outcome of the appeal will normally be communicated within 14 working days of acknowledgement.

The decision at this stage is the College's final internal response.

5. **External Review**

5.1 If all internal stages have been exhausted, complainants may be able to refer the matter to an external body, depending on the nature of their provision, for example:

- the Department for Education (DfE) for Further Education programmes

- the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OiA) for Higher Education programmes,
- the relevant awarding body or partner institution.

The College will provide appropriate signposting at the conclusion of the internal process.

6. Complaints Involving Partners or Subcontractors

6.1 Where a complaint relates to a partner or subcontractor and involves a member of staff employed directly by themselves:

- the complaint will be shared with the relevant cross college manager who oversees that area of work, and the partner organisation will be asked to investigate in line with their own procedures,
- the College will remain the accountable organisation,
- the College will be kept informed of progress and outcomes.

7. Frivolous, Vexatious or Unreasonable Complaints

7.1 The College is committed to dealing with complaints fairly, but reserves the right to take appropriate action where complaints are deemed to be:

- frivolous,
- vexatious,
- abusive or unreasonable.

This may include limiting communication or closing the complaint, while ensuring decisions are justified and documented.

8. Data Protection

8.1 All complaints will be handled in accordance with:

- the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR),
- the College's Data Protection Policy.

Information will only be shared where necessary to investigate and resolve the complaint.

9. Monitoring and Review

- Complaints are logged and monitored by the Quality Team.
- Themes and trends are reported to senior leaders and governors.
- The procedure is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains effective and compliant.