

Northern Regional College

Customer Complaints Policy

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This document can also be produced in alternative formats upon request.

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Northern Regional College

Complaints Policy

1. Policy Statement

Northern Regional College is committed to providing the highest quality of service to all our customers. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of service provided by the College or College staff, they have the right to complain.

A complaint may be defined as:

'A statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.'

www.oxforddictionaries.com

The raising of complaints and the provision of feedback provides the College with an opportunity to improve its services. The College monitors complaints and the outcomes in order to improve the quality of our provision. This policy advises customers of the College's commitment to ensuring that any issues or problems are resolved quickly and as close to the source as possible to the satisfaction of all concerned.

2. Scope

- 2.1. For the purposes of this policy a customer may be a student, external customer, member of the public or third party stakeholder.
- 2.2. The College will comply with the Standards for Complaint Handling in the Public Service agreed by the Permanent Secretaries Group, ensuring that:
 - a) There are clear lines of accountability for the handling and consideration of complaints within the College.
 - b) Complainants have open and easy access to the College's complaints policy and the information required to enable them to complaint about any aspect of service.
 - c) Complaints are dealt with through an efficient and effective process.
 - d) All investigations are conducted promptly, thoroughly, openly, honestly and objectively.
 - e) Complaints are responded to as promptly as possible and all issues raised are addressed.
 - f) The College promotes a culture of learning from complaints so that, where necessary, service, processes and practices can be improved.
 - g) The organisation monitors the effectiveness of its complaint handling and responsiveness.
- 2.3 In addition, the College will:
 - h) Ensure that all positive comments are passed on to the relevant staff members.
 - i) Process all complaints in a fair, consistent and unbiased manner.

- j) Endeavour to communicate with the customer within agreed timeframes throughout the process.
- k) Ensure no customer is disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint.
- l) Promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).
- m) Respect confidentiality and protect customers' data in line with legislation.
- n) Monitor and review complaints and compliments for quality assurance and equality monitoring purposes.

2.4 Exemptions to this policy include:

- a) Anonymous complaints, which will not usually be investigated, but will be recorded.
- b) Matters where another policy or procedure applies; e.g. academic appeals¹.
- c) The right of the College not to investigate unreasonable or vexatious complaints.
- d) Staff complaints which fall under human policies and procedures as provided by human resources².

3. Categories of Customer Feedback

3.1 Compliments and Comments

3.1.1. If a customer feels that the College has exceeded the expected standard of service or wishes to leave a compliment or positive comment, they can:

- a) Complete a Compliments Form (Appendix 2). Forms may be downloaded from the College website or they are available at reception.
- b) E-mail the College at quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk
- c) Advise a member of staff in person of the positive experience.

3.2 Informal Complaint

3.2.1 If there is an occasion where a customer is not satisfied with the service the College provides; they have a right to complain.

3.2.2 We would encourage customers to seek to resolve any issues informally with the relevant member of staff e.g. face-to-face discussion.

3.2.3 Where a resolution cannot be found or if the complaint is sufficiently serious, the customer may submit a formal complaint in writing.

3.3 Formal Complaint

3.3.1 If a customer wishes to make a formal complaint, they can either:

- a) Complete a 'Customer Complaints Form' (Appendix 1). Forms are downloadable from the College website or available at reception.
- b) E-mail the College at quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk

¹ Please refer to Learner Assessment Appeals.

². The process for dealing with a staff complaint will depend on the nature of the complaint and the applicable HR policy or procedure

- c) If the complaint relates to an academic matter, students have the right to contact and engage with the relevant awarding body directly.
- 3.3.2. If a customer wishes to complain verbally, they will be asked to confirm details of their complaint in writing.
- 3.3.3. If assistance is required with the completion of or the submission of a complaint, customers should contact the Quality Manager.
- 3.3.4. Complaints should be submitted to the College no later than three months from the date of the issue arising. In exceptional circumstances, the College may exercise discretion with this timescale.
- 3.3.5. Complaints may be submitted on behalf of someone else, for example a person over the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult. Consent of the individual may be required.
- 3.3.6. All formal complaints will be forwarded to the relevant Responsible Owner³ for an open and objective investigation⁴. Upon completion of the investigation, a written response will be issued to the complainant. For the purposes of this Policy, the Responsible Owner is defined as the individual appointed to investigate the complaint.
- 3.3.7. The College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

Communication	Response Time
Complaint acknowledgement letter/email to customer	5 working days* from receipt of complaint
Letter/email issued to complainant if further information required to progress complaint	Clarification information to be returned within 10 working days of receipt
Complaint response letter/email to customer	20 working days** from date acknowledgement letter/email issued

**Working days are those days on which the College is open. Weekends, statutory days, Bank Holidays and other College closures are classed as 'non-working' days. Complaints specific to course admissions will be acknowledged within 2 working days from receipt of complaint.*

***Complaints specific to course admissions will be responded to within 5 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email is issued.*

- 3.3.8. If, for reasons beyond the College's control the investigation and outcome exceeds, or is likely to exceed the timeframes set out in Table 1, the customer will be notified in writing.

Please also refer to Complaints Process Chart (Appendix 3)

4. Appeals – Formal Complaints

- 4.1. If a customer is dissatisfied with the College response to their complaint, they have the right to appeal. Appeals should be submitted in writing, with full details of the grounds for appeal, to the Quality Manager.

³ Responsible owners are defined in the separate Complaints and Compliments Procedure.

⁴ In the event that the complaint made is about the Principal and Chief Executive, the Chair of the Audit Committee will appoint a suitable person to investigate and report. Any appeal will then be to the Governing Body.

4.2. Following receipt of an appeal the College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Communication	Response Time
Complainant submits appeal to the College	10 working days from date customer receives complaint response
Appeal acknowledgement letter/email to customer	5 working days from receipt of appeal from customer
Appeal response letter/email to customer	20 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email issued

4.3 Appeals will be considered by an individual(s) with no previous connection to the original complaint. The individual(s) appointed to consider the appeal request will depend on the nature of the complaint and appeal lodged.

4.4 If, for reasons beyond the Colleges control, the investigation and outcome exceeds the timeframe or is likely to exceed the timeframe, the customer will be notified in writing.

5. Communications

5.1. Telephone communications

The recording of telephone conversations for the purposes of distribution to and use by any third party, without consent is a breach of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy. The College does not consent to telephone calls being recorded, unless express consent has been obtained.

5.2. Face-to-Face communications

Complaint meetings are confidential. If a meeting is required to resolve the issue, minutes will be kept and issued to those in attendance afterwards. Amendments to the minutes may be requested if any inaccuracy is identified. If the amendment is agreed, a revised minute will be issued. As minutes are kept, recordings of the meeting or conversations in relation to the complaint are not required. College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy, the College does not consent to recording of complaints meetings, unless express consent has been obtained.

6. NIPSO – Formal Complaints

6.1. It is hoped that the College will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints procedure. However if the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome they have the right to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Ombudsman’s Office (NIPSO), in his/her role as Commissioner for Complaints.

- 6.2. The customer can complain to the Ombudsman; however, the Ombudsman will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Complaints Policy, and where it is received within six months of completing the College's complaints process. Contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN
www.nipso.org.uk

- 6.3. Higher Education (HE) students may have the right in certain circumstances to raise the matter with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). Contact details for the CMA are:

Competition and Markets Authority

Victoria House
Southampton Row
London
WC1B 4AD
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority

7. Monitoring Complaints and Compliments

- 7.1. The College welcomes and values all feedback from customers. The College analyses feedback and areas of complaint in order to improve services. All complaints will be dealt with sensitively and in all cases the documentary evidence gathered and stored remains confidential to those involved. Statistical information will be made available for Quality and Equality monitoring purposes.

8. Feedback Regarding this Document

- 8.1. Feedback regarding this document will be handled through this policy and associated procedure. If you have a comment or complaint, or require further information regarding the process, please e-mail quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk.

9. Monitoring and Review of this Document

- 9.1. This document will be monitored on an ongoing basis and subject to a full review at least every two years.
- 9.2. The document may also be updated if changes or improvements in processes or procedures are identified.
- 9.3. In monitoring and reviewing the document the following will be taken into consideration:

- feedback regarding the content and format of the document;
- uptake and usage;
- comments or complaints regarding the document.

Northern Regional College Customer Complaints Form

If you require assistance with making a complaint, please contact the Quality Manager.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, consistent with a full investigation of the issue.

If you are submitting a complaint on behalf of someone else, please provide their name/contact details in **Section 1B**. The College may contact the individual for permission to discuss the issue with you.

Section 1A – Complainant Details

Title (Miss/Mrs/Ms/Mr/Other):						
Name:						
Contact Address:						
Telephone Number:						
E-mail:						
Student ID (if applicable)						
Course Title (if applicable)						
Status (please 'X')						
FE/WBL Student	HE Student	Parent or Guardian	Member of the Public	Employer	Organisation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Section 1B – Details of person on whose behalf you are submitting this complaint, if different to above

Title (Miss/Mrs/Ms/Mr/Other):						
Name:						
Contact Address:						
Telephone Number:						
E-mail:						
Student ID (if applicable)						
Course Title (if applicable)						
Status (please 'X')						
FE/WBL Student	HE Student	Parent or Guardian	Member of the Public	Employer	Organisation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you have their consent to raise this matter? (please 'X')		Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	

This form continues overleaf/below

Section 2 – Details of Complaint

Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.	
Date/s issue/problem occurred:	
Campus Complaint related to:	
Nature of Complaint:	
Have you attempted to resolve this issue informally? Yes / No If Yes , please summarise any action taken to resolve your issue/s to date.	

Section 3

What do you see as a suitable remedy to address the issue or matter raised?

This form should be returned:

By post to:

Quality Manager, Northern Regional College, Trostan Avenue, Ballymena, BT43 7BN.

By e-mail to:

quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk

NB: You can post your complaint externally, or leave it at your nearest Campus Reception.

I understand that a copy of this form may be provided to a member of staff if they are the subject of the issue.

Complainant's Signature:	Date:
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Office Use Only			
Date received:		Date acknowledged:	
Received by:		Responsible Owner:	

Northern Regional College Customer Compliments Form

If you require assistance with making a complaint, please contact the Quality Manager.

If we have done something well, we value and appreciate your positive feedback

Title (Miss/Mrs/Ms/Mr/Other):					
Name:					
Contact Address:					
Telephone Number:					
E-mail:					
Student ID (if applicable)					
Course Title (if applicable)					
Status (please 'X')					
WBL/FE Student	HE Student	Parent or Guardian	Member of the Public	Employer	Organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Details of Compliment: Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.

This form should be returned:

By post to:

Quality Manager, Northern Regional College, Trostan Avenue, Ballymena, BT43 7BN.

By e-mail to:

quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk

NB: You can post your complaint externally, or leave it at your nearest Campus Reception.

Signature:	Date:
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Office Use Only			
Date received:		Date acknowledged:	
Received by:		Responsible Owner:	

Northern Regional College Complaints Process Chart

