

Customer Complaints Policy

QUA 4

Issue	Date of 1st Issue	Last Reviewed	Date of Next Review	Responsibility of
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This document can also be produced in alternative formats upon request.

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Customer Complaints Policy

1. Policy Statement

Northern Regional College, 'the 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 Service Standards for Complaint Handling in line with same principles as 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 complain 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.

The College also adheres to guidance provided by the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman (NIPSO).

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.

¹ Please refer to Learner Assessment Appeals.

- c) The right of the College not to investigate unreasonable or vexatious complaints.
- d) Staff complaints which fall under human resources policies and procedures as provided by human resources².

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

3. Categories of Customer Feedback

3.1. Compliments and Comments

- 3.1.1. If a customer feels that 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, in the first instance, 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 it is not appropriate to raise the issues informally, the customer may submit a formal complaint in writing.

3.3. Formal Complaint

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) Email the College at: quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk ;
- c) If the complaint relates to an academic matter, students have the right to contact and engage with the relevant awarding body directly, however Awarding Organisations will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Complaints Policy.

- 3.3.1. If a customer wishes to complain verbally, they will be asked to confirm details of their complaint in writing.
- 3.3.2. If assistance is required with the completion of or the submission of a complaint, customers should contact the Quality Manager for support.
- 3.3.3. 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.
- 3.3.4. Complaints may be submitted on behalf of someone else, for example a person a vulnerable adult. If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone over 13, consent from the individual or power of authority may be required.
- 3.3.5. 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 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.

3.3.6. The College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed in Table 1.

Complaint Timeframes

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 of complaint
Complaint response letter/email to customer	Within 20 working days** from date acknowledgement letter/email issued, or from date clarification information is received from customer (if applicable)

**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.*

3.3.7. 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 as soon as practicably possible. Please also refer to Complaints Process Chart (Appendix 3)

4. Appeals

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

Appeal Timeframes
Table 2

Communication	Response Time
Complainant submits appeal to the College	Within 10 working days from date customer receives complaint response
Appeal acknowledgement letter/email to customer	Within 5 working days from receipt of appeal from customer
Appeal response letter/email to customer	Within 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, as soon as practicably possible.

5. Communications

Complaint meetings and phone calls are confidential. If a meeting is required to resolve the issue, minutes will be taken and made available upon request to those in attendance. If the complainant identifies any inaccuracies the minute will be reviewed, and where an amendment is agreed a revised minute will be issued. College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy the College does not consent to conversations being recorded, unless express consent has been obtained in advance.

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 Awarding Body (where applicable) or the Northern Ireland Ombudsman's Office (NIPSO), in his/her role as Commissioner for Complaints.
- 6.2. The customer can complain to NIPSO; however, NIPSO 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

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. Communication

This policy is available at www.nrc.ac.uk under 'Your Application' and is accessible via the Staff and Student Intranet. It can also be made available, upon request, in alternative formats including large print, braille, audio and other languages.

9. Quality Assurance

9.1. Comments and complaints regarding this document will be handled through the College's comments and complaints mechanisms. If you have a comment or complaint, or require further information regarding the process, please e-mail quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk.

9.2. The following processes must be followed to monitor and review this document:

- a. It will be monitored on an ongoing basis and subject to a full review at least every two years.
- b. It may also be updated if changes or improvements in processes or procedures are identified.
- c. 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;
 - Equality information and monitoring data.

10. Links to other Documents

10.1. Internal Documents:

- Complaints Procedure

10.2. External Documents

- FE Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule
- [QAA Quality Code](#)

Appendix 1 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		No		

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/s or matter/s raised?

This form should be returned:

By post to:

Quality Manager, Northern Regional College, Trostan Ave, 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.

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and used for the purpose of investigating your complaint. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a public task or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller e.g. Public Authorities are subject to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating your complaint. It may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a lawful basis to do so. Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website.

I realise that if I choose not to agree to these terms, the College will be unable to investigate my complaint.

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:	

Appendix 2 Customer Compliments Form

If you require assistance with making a compliment, 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')					
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"/>

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.

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and used for the purpose of investigating your complaint. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a **public task** or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller e.g. Public Authorities are subject to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating your complaint. It may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a lawful basis to do so. Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website.

This form should be returned:

By post to: Quality Manager, Northern Regional College, Trostan Ave, Ballymena, BT43

7BN. By e-mail to: quality.improvement@nrc.ac.uk

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

Signature:	Date:
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<i>Office Use Only</i>			
Date received:		Date acknowledged:	
Received by:		Responsible Owner:	

Appendix 3 Formal Customer Complaints Process

