

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.**

Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to everyone working, studying at or visiting the College. This includes all staff, volunteers, Governors, external agencies, parents/carers and students.

Why do we need this policy / background information?

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.

A complaint can concern any area of the business where the complainant feels an action is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.

A complaints process is necessary to ensure the College is accountable to students, parents, customers, employers, contractors, local residents and visitors.

Effective complaint handling can provide key benefits to the College such as:

- Providing information that can lead to improvements in service and curriculum delivery.
- Improving the reputation of, and strengthening public confidence in, the College's administrative processes.

Historical complaints, i.e. complaints made six months after completion of study at the College, will not be accepted. However, in some cases, such as complaints with safeguarding implications, an individual approach will be taken. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The College operates a four stage complaints process:

Stage 1 (local complaints)

This is the stage at which complaints are handled locally; the complainant can address their concerns directly with the person(s), team or Directorate concerned.

- It is recommended that complaints are dealt with locally wherever possible. In the first instance, issues should be raised with the relevant staff member or team. If the complainant requires assistance in contacting a member of staff or team, they should contact main reception on 01202 205205.
- Verbal complaints to reception and staff in public areas and requests to meet the Principal

should be referred to the relevant Director.

- If the Quality Team receive a complaint in writing or by email and consider it to be a local complaint, they will send it direct to the relevant staff member / area to acknowledge, log and resolve.
- Local complaints should be acknowledged within 2 working days and responded to within 5 working days.
- Any documentation relating to local complaints should be retained for 2 years. Where a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved at this level, it can be escalated by the complainant to Stage 2 (central complaints).

Stage 2 (central complaints)

Complaints will be resolved locally wherever possible; however, a complainant can request that the complaint moves to Stage 2 (central complaints) if they are not satisfied with the local resolution.

Central complaints should be submitted in writing either by letter or email (quality@bpc.ac.uk) to the Quality Team, providing name; contact details; details about the complaint; and what outcome is being sought.

A complaint must be escalated immediately to the Quality Team to deal with where any part of it relates to:

- Equality and Diversity ((i.e. discrimination, bullying and harassment)
- Health and Safety
- Requests for fee refunds or waivers

Note: Where a complaint concerns a Safeguarding matter, it will be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Process

- All central complaints will be logged and acknowledged by the Quality Team within 2 working days of receiving the complaint. A response detailing the outcome of an investigation will be provided within 10 working days. However, where it is not possible to provide an outcome within 10 working days, due to the complexity of the investigation or staff leave, the complainant will receive a holding reply, with an explanation of the delay and a date for when the full response can be expected.
- The Quality Team will nominate an appropriate Manager / Director to investigate, known as the 'Investigating Officer'. S/he will thoroughly investigate each element of the complaint and provide a bullet point response to the Quality Team within 7 working days. The Quality Team will then draft the reply to the complainant.
- If the complaint is about a member of staff and the Investigating Officer finds that there are issues of capability or that disciplinary action is required, the Investigating Officer 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 People Team.

- The concluding paragraph will outline whether the College agrees with the complaint and if so, what resolutions are being put in place.

Monitoring of central complaints

- Central complaints will be regularly analysed to look for trends and to ensure service improvement.
- The Board of Corporation will receive updates on complaints relating to Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity or Health and Safety in the annual report and an overview of complaints will be included in the College Self-Assessment Report.

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 or is a vulnerable adult, details of the complaint cannot be discussed with any other person unless permission is explicitly given by the complainant.

Where a complaint is made directly by a third party, the person that the complaint relates to will be contacted to confirm that they are happy for the third party to act on their behalf and that the information relating to the complaint is accurate. If the person concerned does not wish for the complaint to be investigated, then the third party will be advised of this and an investigation will not take place. However, should the third party's complaint raise a significant concern, i.e. safeguarding or criminal activity, then it may be that an investigation is required, and the person concerned will be informed and involved in the process. If required, support will also be provided to the person whom the complaint relates to.

Stage 3 (internal appeals)

This is the appeals stage. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response they receive to a central complaint, they have 10 working days from receipt of response to put their grounds for appeal (in writing) to the Assistant Principal (Curriculum) or the Assistant Principal (People and Student Experience).

The appeal will then be forwarded to the College Executive for final investigation.

To lodge an appeal, there must be evidence of one or more of the following:

- The College has not followed the formal procedure as described in this policy.
- Incorrect evidence was used during the investigation or new evidence has arisen.

The Assistant Principal will make the decision as to whether an appeal meets the criteria as set out above. If the appeal does meet the criteria then the appeal is forwarded to the Executive to consider. If it does not, the appeal will be rejected and the complainant will be informed in writing within 10 working days, with the reasons.

Stage 4 (external appeals)

- If at Stage 3 the complainant remains dissatisfied, they will be advised as to which external agency is most appropriate for the complaint to be referred to. This may include organisations such as the relevant Awarding Organisation, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
- College employees must use the internal Human Resources Complaints Procedure where

a complaint is about another member of staff, but they can use this policy where a complaint is about a college service.

Roles and Responsibilities

Staff

All college staff have a responsibility for treating complaints seriously and dealing with them promptly, courteously and in accordance with this policy. Staff are also expected to provide any assistance to support a complainant when making a complaint. All staff have a responsibility to try and resolve local complaints.

Quality Team

The Quality Team is responsible for deciding at which stage a complaint should be managed. Local complaints will be forwarded to the team who will manage the complaint.

When dealing with a central complaint, the Quality Team will record and acknowledge the complaint; allocate a Manager / Director from outside the curriculum / service area to investigate; monitor the progress of the investigation; ensure the quality of the response; and provide the final written response. In addition, the Quality Team will monitor the progress of the recommendations and actions as well as provide reports to the Senior Leadership Team, the Executive Team and the Board of Corporation.

Executive Director of Higher Education and Skills

The Executive Director of Higher Education and Skills will be informed of any complaint made by an apprentice or relating to an apprenticeship.

Assistant Principal (People and Student Experience)

The Assistant Principal (People and Student Experience) will be responsible for managing complaints where serious safeguarding or Prevent concerns are raised.

Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality will have responsibility for approving or declining a request to appeal the outcome of a complaint and taking the relevant course of action. If the complaint is in reference to the Vice Principal Curriculum, the appeal request will be decided by the Principal.

College Management Team

Any member of the College Management Team may be called upon to investigate a central complaint.

The Principal

The College Principal 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.

Board of the Corporation

The Board of Corporation is responsible for ensuring that the Complaints Policy is operating effectively and may become directly involved if a complaint relates to the Principal or members of the Board. The Board of Corporation will also approve any changes to the policy.

Liaison with external agencies

If the investigation uncovers serious criminal behaviour or activity (i.e. theft, racism, 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.

Links to College values and other College policies

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

- Safeguarding Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statement
- Health and Safety 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 of IT Policy
- Staff Grievance Procedure

Who needs to understand this policy and how will they know about it?

The following training and awareness will be put in place:

Who?	How?
Students	Policy available on the college website; reference made to it during induction; advice and support when enquiring about making a complaint.
College managers	Included in college-wide communication; training for Investigating Officers; copies of the policy available on Teamhub
Teaching staff	Briefing by Directors and Learning Managers; copies of the policy available on Teamhub
Professional Services staff	Briefing by line managers; copies of the policy available on Teamhub

How does this policy fit with the College’s Equality and Diversity policy?

BPC Equal Opportunities
<p>This policy has been examined for equality impact i.e. the impact that this policy will have on different groups of current or potential learners, service users and staff, taking into account the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation).</p>
<p>1. If equality impact analysis is not relevant to this function, please give reasons.</p>
<p>2. In what ways could this function have a negative impact on any of the groups above? What actions have been taken to eliminate these?</p> <p>This policy is intended to provide a positive, supportive and transparent approach to all, as such no groups of students with protected characteristics should experience a negative impact. This policy could have an impact on persons with sight impairment or additional needs in terms of access. This will be supported appropriately.</p>
<p>3. In what ways could this function have a positive impact on any of the groups above? How will this function be used to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups? Are there plans for the future which will further advance equality?</p> <p>This policy will support an inclusive and non-discriminatory learning environment staff where any issues arising of dissatisfaction or concern will be swiftly addressed.</p>
<p>4. What evidence supports your judgements? E.g. Consultations, observations, expert opinions, quantative or qualitative surveys? If the evidence is in the form of an additional document, where is it stored?</p> <p>The policy is developed by the Quality Team and ratified by the Senior Leadership Team.</p>

Policy approved by: Senior Leadership Team

Date: September 2022

Due for Review: September 2025