

Complaints Policy

For the attention of: All Staff, Students, Parents/Carers and Stakeholders

Produced by: CEO and Group Principal

Approved by: SLT

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Vision, Purpose & Values

Our Vision

Our students will be recognised locally & nationally for their positive impact on the communities and industries in which they choose to work.

Our Purpose

To inspire our students to gain the skills, knowledge and behaviours they need to be resilient and thrive in an ever-changing world.

Our Values

Excellence: A culture of creativity, high expectations, ambition and aspiration

Respect: Showing fairness, courtesy and mutual respect to each other and our environment

Integrity: Honesty, openness and trust at the heart of College life

Diversity: Celebrating diversity and inclusivity as a key to our success

Contents

1. Purpose	4
2. Scope	4
3. Matters Excluded from This Policy	5
4. Definitions	5
5. Principles	5
PART A – Complaints Process	6
PART B – Appeals Process	7
PART C – External Escalation	8
PART D – Unreasonable or Abusive Behaviour	9
PART E – Confidentiality and Data Protection	10
PART F – Equality, Reasonable Adjustments and Consumer Rights	10
PART G – Governance and Monitoring	11
6. Review	11

1. Purpose

The College is committed to providing high quality education and services. We recognise that concerns, complaints and appeals provide valuable feedback and help us improve.

This policy sets out:

- How concerns and complaints may be raised
- How appeals will be considered
- The grounds on which appeals may be made
- The timescales and stages involved
- When matters may be escalated externally
- How we manage unreasonable or abusive behaviour

This policy applies to Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) provision delivered by the College, including DfE and devolved funded provision.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Current students
- Former students (within time limits below)
- Applicants
- Apprentices
- Employers (where relevant to provision)
- Parents/carers of students under 18
- External stakeholders

It covers complaints including but not limited to:

- Teaching and learning
- Curriculum delivery
- Student services
- Safeguarding (subject to safeguarding procedures)
 - Where a complaint raises safeguarding, welfare, Prevent, criminal, or immediate risk concerns, the College may refer the matter immediately under its safeguarding procedures and/or to external agencies. The complaints process may continue, pause, or run in parallel, depending on the circumstances and any advice from statutory agencies.
- Equality and diversity

- Administration and customer service
- Assessment processes (procedural issues only)
- Local stakeholder concerns

3. Matters Excluded from This Policy

The following are not considered under this policy:

- Academic judgement (e.g. disagreement with a grade itself - refer to Head of Department in first instance)
- Admissions appeals (covered under Admissions Policy)
- Staff grievances (covered under HR procedures)
- Freedom of Information requests (handled via the Personal Data Complaints Policy)
- Data Subject Access Requests (handled via the Personal Data Complaints Policy)

Where a complaint overlaps with another policy, the College may run parallel processes where appropriate.

4. Definitions

Concern – An issue that may be resolved quickly and informally.

Complaint – An expression of dissatisfaction requiring investigation.

Appeal – A request for a formal review of a decision made under Stage 2.

Completion of Procedures Letter – Formal notification that internal processes have concluded.

5. Principles

All complaints and appeals will be handled:

- Fairly and impartially
- Promptly
- Confidentially (subject to investigation requirements)
- In line with Equality Act 2010
- Without victimisation

No student will be disadvantaged for raising a complaint in good faith.

PART A – Complaints Process

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Where possible, concerns should be raised with the relevant member of staff or manager.

- Response target: 10 College working days (excluding holiday periods) from the date of acknowledgement.
- May be verbal or written and will be recorded on the complaints register.
- Not normally subject to formal written outcome

If unresolved, the matter may proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint Process

5.1 Submission

Formal complaints must be submitted in writing within:

- 3 months of the event (unless, due to evidence extenuating circumstances, an extension is permitted by the College in its absolute discretion)

Complaints must include:

- Full name and student ID (where applicable)
- Clear summary of issues
- Dates and relevant facts
- Evidence relied upon
- Desired outcome

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated unless safeguarding or public interest concerns apply.

Formal complaints may be sent to complaints@windsor-forest.ac.uk.

5.2 Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement within 5 working days

5.3 Investigation

- Investigator appointed who has had no prior involvement.

- Investigation may include document review, interviews, and evidence gathering.
- Target outcome: 20 working days excluding college holidays.
- Complex cases may extend with written explanation.

5.4 Outcomes

The complaint may be:

- Not upheld
- Partially upheld
- Upheld

The written outcome will include:

- Summary of complaint
- Findings
- Decision
- Any remedial action
- Right to appeal

PART B – Appeals Process

Stage 3 – Appeal Request

An appeal must be submitted via complaints@windsor-forest.ac.uk within 10 working days of the Stage 2 outcome. The appeal must identify the specific appeal ground relied upon, explain why that ground is met, identify any new evidence, and state the outcome sought.

Appeals will only be accepted on the following grounds:

1. Procedural irregularity
2. New material evidence unavailable at Stage 2
3. Decision was unreasonable in light of evidence
4. Bias or conflict of interest

Appeals that simply restate the original complaint will not be accepted.

Stage 4 – Appeal Review

- Conducted by the CEO or designate not involved previously.

- The appeal reviewer will have had no material prior involvement in the complaint or the decision under appeal. Where no suitable internal reviewer is available, the College may appoint an appropriately senior independent reviewer.
- Review of documentation and new evidence only; however, the reviewer may invite further written representations, seek clarification, or convene a meeting where this is necessary for fairness/effective determination of the appeal.
- Not a full reinvestigation unless justified.
- Target outcome: 20 working days unless complexity of case requires longer in which case all parties will be informed in writing.

Possible outcomes:

- Appeal rejected
- Appeal upheld
- Appeal partially upheld

The decision at Stage 4 concludes internal processes.

PART C – External Escalation

Further Education

After completion of internal stages, complainants may refer matters to:

Department for Education (DfE)

DfE Help Portal <https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/access-the-enquiry-portal/>

Complaints must normally be made within 12 months of the event.

The DfE will not investigate unless internal processes are exhausted.

Greater London Authority (GLA) Funded Students (in addition to DfE)

Provider Complaints, Skills and Employment Unit, Greater London Authority, 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL

skillscomplaints@london.gov.uk

Complaints must normally be made within 12 months of the event

Higher Education

Students may escalate to:

- Validating University (where applicable)
- Awarding organisation
- Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

A Completion of Procedures Letter will be issued at Stage 4. Where applicable, the Completion of Procedures Letter will state the procedure applied, summarise the issues considered, identify the final decision and reasons, explain the role of the OIA, and specify the exact deadline for submitting any complaint to the OIA. Students must submit complaints to the OIA within 12 months of this letter.

OIA, PO Box 3362, Reading RG1 9UF

Tel: 0118 959 9813

Online complaint form: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/myoia/>

PART D – Unreasonable or Abusive Behaviour

The College is committed to handling complaints fairly. However, we are not obliged to engage in correspondence (written or verbal) that:

- Is abusive, threatening or defamatory
- Is discriminatory or harassing
- Repeats substantially identical complaints
- Refuses to accept completion of procedures
- Submits excessive or irrelevant documentation
- Seeks to overwhelm the process through volume
- Makes demands outside the scope of this policy
- Seeks unrealistic remedies
- Involves persistent contact after conclusion

Where behaviour is deemed unreasonable, the College may:

- Limit communication to written correspondence only
- Nominate a single point of contact
- Restrict frequency of responses
- Decline to respond to repetitive submissions
- Close the matter formally

A written notice will be provided if restrictions are applied.

Lengthy, Repetitive or Irrelevant Submissions The College recognises that complainants may use legal assistance or automated tools. The College will not restrict communication merely because a complainant is persistent, raises difficult issues, seeks advice, or is legally represented. Restrictions will be proportionate, time-limited where appropriate, and will not prevent consideration of genuinely new matters.

However:

- Submissions must clearly identify grounds for appeal under this policy.
- Generalised legal assertions without relevance to the specific case will not be separately addressed.
- Repetitive legal citations without demonstration of procedural error will not extend timescales.
- Excessive documentation intended to obstruct or delay process may be summarised and considered proportionately.

The College's obligation is to address substantive issues, not to respond line-by-line to argumentative or repetitive correspondence.

PART E – Confidentiality and Data Protection

All complaints will be processed in line with UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (DUAA).

Information will only be shared with those directly involved.

Complaint records will be retained for 6 years.

Data Protection Complaints

If you believe the College has not handled your personal data correctly, this should be raised through our new complaints procedure. We will acknowledge your complaint, and if you remain unhappy with our response, you have the right to escalate your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) at ico.org.uk or on 0303 123 1113

PART F – Equality, Reasonable Adjustments and Consumer Rights

The College will consider reasonable adjustments proactively where it is aware, or ought reasonably to be aware, that a complainant may require support to

access the procedure. Also, reasonable adjustments will be made upon request. These include:

- Alternative formats
- Interpreter support
- Adjusted communication methods
- Representation at meetings

Where applicable, including in relation to Higher Education and full cost commercial provision, the College recognises its obligations to students under the Consumer Rights Act 2015.

PART G – Governance and Monitoring

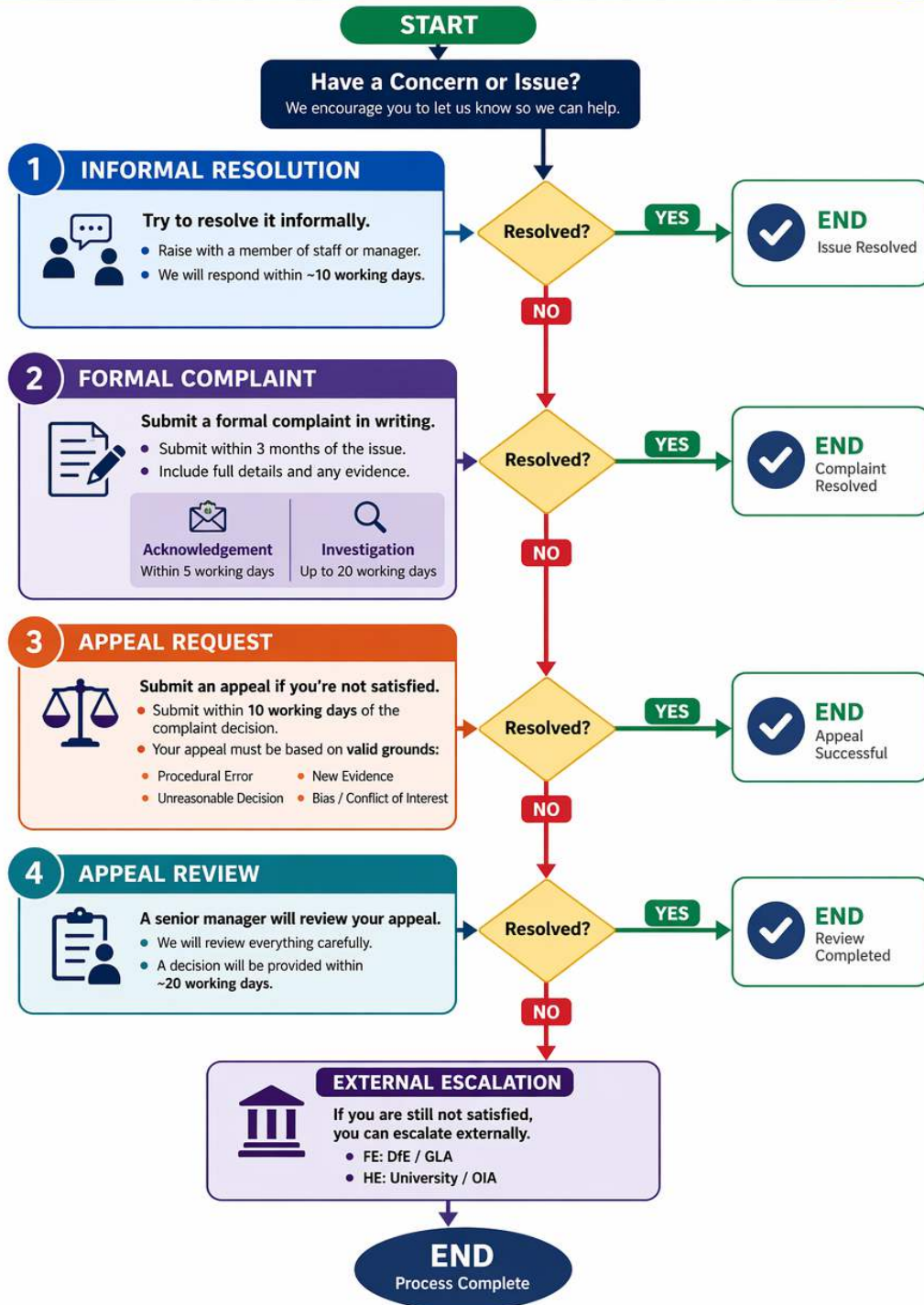
The College will:

- Log all formal complaints
- Produce termly reports to Senior Leadership
- Report annually to Governors
- Monitor themes and remedial actions
 - Key reporting subjects will be:
 - reporting on compliance with timescales;
 - numbers upheld, partially upheld and not upheld;
 - number of complaints involving SEND/equality/safeguarding issues;
 - repeat issues by department or campus;
 - implementation of remedies, including timescales;
 - external escalation outcomes;
 - staff training needs and timetable to address same.

6. Review

Policy review cycle: Every 2 years

Appendix 1 – Complaints and Appeals Process Flowchart



STOP Exclusions Apply | **Strict Time Limits** | **Fair & Impartial** | **No Abusive Behaviour**