

# Compliments, Comments & Complaints Policy & Procedure

For the attention of: All Staff  
Produced by: Principal  
Approved by: SLT  
Date of publication: October 2017  
Date of review: October 2019





## Our Mission

**Inspire ambition and make a positive difference to lives through learning.**

## Our Values

**Learners First** - placing the learner at the heart of all we do

**Community** - working collaboratively to achieve

**Empowering** - enabling all in a caring environment to achieve their full potential

**Excellence** - a culture of creativity, high expectations, ambition and aspiration

**Diversity** - celebrating diversity and inclusivity as a key to our success

**Integrity** - honesty, openness and trust at the heart of College life

**Respect** - showing fairness, courtesy and mutual respect

# Compliments, Comments & Complaints

## Contents

- 1. Policy Statement .....4
- 2. Procedure.....5
- 4. Complaints .....6

## 1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 This policy outlines how Windsor Forest Colleges Group will deal with compliments, comments and complaints from customers and stakeholders.
- 1.2 Windsor Forest Colleges Group strives to achieve the highest standards of customer service for all stakeholders. Customer service standards are defined through each department's annual Quality Improvement Plan. These are monitored and maintained by department managers and directors.
- 1.3 Windsor Forest Colleges Group is committed to having a formal Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure, which allows customers to provide valuable feedback about our products and services. This will ensure that we provide quality services for our customers and are responsive to their needs.
- 1.4 Customers are defined as: Students, External customers using College facilities, Businesses, Organisations or individuals that the College works with or has a business relationship with.
- 1.5 The purpose of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy is:
  - a) To encourage customer feedback
  - b) To provide effective means for people who use Windsor Forest Colleges Group services to provide feedback, whether positive or negative
  - c) To confirm the individual's right to complain or share their opinions
  - d) To ensure that compliments, comments and complaints are dealt with effectively and impartially
  - e) To direct that complaints should be resolved:
    - as quickly as possible
    - as close to the point of delivery as possible
    - fairly (for all parties)
    - with the minimum of inconvenience to the Complainant
    - In a consultative manner and with the aim of agreeing a solution
  - f) To ensure that we respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner as a key part of our customer service strategy
  - g) To provide a framework for the delivery of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure
- 1.6 The Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy will not be used to deal with staff disciplinary issues or grievance issues. There are separate policies in place to cover these areas. In some instances, a reported complaint might lead to an investigation under a separate policy. In this case, the customer will be kept informed as appropriate.
- 1.7 Windsor Forest Colleges Group does not entertain anonymous complaints in all but the most exceptional of circumstances.
- 1.8 Policy on malicious complaints – Windsor Forest Colleges Group takes the issue of malicious complaints very seriously. If, after investigation, a complaint is considered to have been made maliciously and/or without foundation then this could, if appropriate, result in action against the person making the complaint.

- 1.9 All complaints and compliments are associated with Windsor Forest Colleges Group and not with individual members of staff.
- 1.10 The objective of the complaints process is to investigate and improve the services that we offer and to be accountable to our customers and stakeholders. The policy of Windsor Forest Colleges Group is to respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner. All complaints will be treated seriously.
- 1.11 The Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure below will detail minimum expectations, timelines, responsibilities and the agreed process for responding to Customer feedback.
- 1.12 All complaints will be dealt with fairly and decisions will be made on the balance of probabilities.
- 1.13 Any customer who feels that the College has not dealt effectively with their complaint has the option to take up the complaint with the Skills Funding Agency via the 'Complaints against Providers' process. Customers will be informed of this process once the College process is exhausted.
- 1.14 Higher Education complaints – complainants should approach the College first with their complaint. Depending on the circumstances of the complaint they could be advised to make their complaint through the complaints procedure of the relevant University. In this instance the College will provide details of the University's procedure.
- 1.15 For any complaint relating to Higher Education customers have the option to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator after the relevant University's complaints procedure has been exhausted.

## 2. Procedure

- 2.1 The objective of this procedure is to:
  - a) Implement the above compliments, comments and complaints policy for Windsor Forest Colleges Group
  - b) Ensure that the College responds to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner as a key part of our customer service strategy
  - c) Welcome feedback as an opportunity to improve the services that we offer
  - d) Encourage a culture of openness around compliments/comments/ complaints
  - e) To direct that complaints should be resolved:
    - as quickly as possible
    - as close to the point of delivery as possible
    - fairly (for all parties)
    - with the minimum of inconvenience to the Complainant
    - in a personal way, observing best practice for customer service

- f) To ensure that customer compliments, comments and complaints are used to develop overall improvements to the way that we work.

2.1.1 All compliments, comments and complaints will be treated seriously but should be dealt with informally in the first instance whenever possible and addressed at the point of delivery.

## 2.2 Compliments and Comments

2.2.1 All compliments and comments should be properly acknowledged and the customer thanked for their feedback.

2.2.2 Compliments or comments received in writing should be acknowledged in writing.

2.2.3 Whoever receives a compliment or comment should pass it on to the Director or Head of the Department and cc to the Quality Office in order that the senior managers in the College can understand customer feedback and drive recognition of good performance.

## 3. Complaints

### 3.1 Informal Complaints - Complaint Handling Formula

3.1.1 All team members are involved in customer service so may be involved in handling Team members dealing with a complaint should work to the following simple formula:

- Listen
- Ask questions
- AGREE a solution – check satisfaction
- Implement the solution – NOW
- Follow up and check satisfaction

3.1.2 The College's approach is to take all complaints seriously and staff are advised to:

- Listen carefully to what the customer has to say and let them finish. Do not get defensive.
- Ask questions in a caring and concerned manner.
- Put yourself in their shoes.
- Apologise without blaming.
- Ask them: what solution do you want? Become a partner with them in solving the problem.
- Solve the problem, or find someone who can solve it quickly.

3.1.3 The aim should be to deal with less significant issues in an informal way at the point of service delivery to ensure a speedy resolution.

### 3.2 Students

3.2.1 In the first instance, students should discuss their complaint with their Tutor. Many problems can be resolved with this direct interaction. If an immediate resolution is not possible, or the student is not satisfied with the outcome, they should inform their Tutor or another member of the staff team who will ensure that the matter is investigated informally. The member of staff will try to identify an informal solution to the problem.

- 3.2.2 If the student is not satisfied with the proposed informal solution, they may choose to then make a formal complaint.
- 3.2.3 If a student needs help in making a formal complaint, this can be obtained either through Reception, through the Learning Centre or by contacting a member of the Student Services Team.
- 3.2.4 Higher Education students should approach the College with any complaint in the first instance. Depending on the circumstances it may be more relevant for the student to complain via the complaints process of the relevant university – in which case College staff should advise the student of this and provide details of the university's procedures.

### **3.3 Employers and Businesses**

- 3.3.1 Informal feedback should initially be directed to a member of staff within the area where the complaint is based. Complaints can often be resolved with this direct interaction. However, if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome then they may choose to then make a formal complaint to the Curriculum Director or Head of Department responsible for the area of the complaint.
- 3.3.2 This formal complaint should be dealt with as per the process below, but any formal complaint concerning an employer should also be notified to the Assistant Principal Marketing & Business Development to ensure that the appropriate senior managers are aware.

### **3.4 Other External Customers/Community**

- 3.4.1 Informal feedback should initially be directed to a member of staff within the area where the complaint is based. Complaints can often be resolved with this direct interaction. However, if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome then they may choose to then make a formal complaint to the Curriculum Director or Head of Department responsible for the area of the complaint.
- 3.4.2 This formal complaint should be dealt with as per the process below.

### **3.5 Formal Complaints**

- 3.5.1 If the customer is not satisfied with the informal resolution to the complaint then the formal complaints process begins.
- 3.5.2 A formal complaint is one received in writing via letter or email or made over the telephone to the Principal's Office. Alternatively a complaint initially dealt with informally can be made formal at the request of the customer or if it cannot be resolved informally. The College will not ask customers to put complaints in writing in order to trigger the formal complaints process
- 3.5.3 Formal complaints must be logged, investigated and the outcome recorded. The Principal is responsible for monitoring complaints so must be made aware of formal complaints as soon as they are received.
- 3.5.4 Notes of any telephone conversations should be taken and copies kept of all correspondence

### 3.5.5 Stage 1 – receipt of complaint/processing/immediate response

Once the complaint has been received by the Principal a **holding response is sent IMMEDIATELY** to the customer explaining that the complaint is being dealt with by a named manager and the complaint is forwarded **IMMEDIATELY (within 2 working hours)** to the Manager responsible. Email should be used whenever possible.

This person then becomes the owner of the complaint.

The complaint owner should contact the customer as soon as possible, or within 2 working days, by telephone if possible, to explain that they are dealing with the complaint, to give the customer their contact details and to agree the timeframe for resolution

### 3.5.6 Stage 2 – Investigation/Agreement of resolution/Confirmation of resolution

The complaint owner takes the following action:

- Investigate the complaint by interviewing staff or customers as necessary. Notes should be taken of phone calls and meetings
- Consult with their line manager
- Agree the resolution with the customer within ten working days of receipt of the complaint or within the previously agreed timeline
- Resolution should be presented/agreed in person where possible or, failing that, by telephone. Resolution should only be presented in writing if no other contact details are available or if specifically requested by the complainant
- The target timeframe to agree a resolution to a complaint with all customers is **within ten working days of receipt**. This may not be possible in complex cases, in which case the customer should be informed of the proposed timeframe to agree a resolution

If the customer is satisfied:

- The complaint owner (Manager) informs the Principal of the agreed resolution and follows up in writing to the customer to confirm it within a further 5 working days

### 3.5.7 Stage 3 – Escalation

If the customer remains dissatisfied following the response from the manager the complaint is escalated to the relevant senior manager.

The senior manager is now the complaint owner and will do the following:

- The senior manager will contact the customer IMMEDIATELY to explain that they are now dealing with the complaint and to agree the next step
- The senior manager will write to the customer to confirm that they are dealing with the complaint and to provide a copy of the Windsor Forest Colleges Group College Compliments, Comment and Complaints Procedure
- CD to meet with the customer or speak on the telephone and agree a solution/give a response
- Follow up in writing

### 3.5.8 Stage 4 – Appeal

In exceptional circumstances if the customer is still not satisfied after the previous steps they may appeal in writing. The appeal will be dealt with by the Principal within 14 days. The Principal will consult with colleagues who have been involved in the complaint, may meet with the complainant to hear the appeal and give a final decision.

### **3.5.9 Stage 5 – Final Appeal**

In very exceptional circumstances if the customer is still not satisfied after the previous steps then the matter can be appealed to the Group Principal and CEO in writing within a further 14 days.

Any customer who feels that the College has not dealt effectively with their complaint has the option to take up the complaint with the Skills Funding Agency via the 'Complaints against Providers' process. A copy of this process is available for customers from the Learning Centre or from Reception and customers will be informed of this process once the College process is exhausted.

Any Higher Education student who is still unhappy after all College procedures have been exhausted, they can choose to complain to their respective university awarding body (they should refer to their course handbook for more details), and then to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator:

Any complaint to the OIA must be submitted within 3 months of the Completion of Procedures letter being received by the student (see page 8). The OIA will not normally consider complaints, which have not followed the University's procedures through all stages, including appeal.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education may be contacted at:

Office of the Independent Adjudicator  
Third Floor  
Kings Reach  
38-50 Kings Road  
Reading RG1 3AA  
Tel: 0118 959 9813

Email: [enquiries@oiahe.org](mailto:enquiries@oiahe.org)

Website: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

### **3.6 General Notes on Formal Complaint Handling Process**

- 3.6.1 All complaints will be considered as complaints against Windsor Forest Colleges Group and not against individual members of staff
- 3.6.2 Every formal communication either from the complainant or from the College should be copied to the Principal's Office
- 3.6.3 Notes will be kept of meetings, all telephone calls will be logged and this information will be copied to the Principal's Office
- 3.6.4 All complaints will be treated as confidential and will be handled with sensitivity by the investigating manager

### **3.7 Monitoring and Quality Assurance**

- 3.7.1 The Principal's Office will maintain live records on live formal complaints to the and an annual report for the Windsor Forest Colleges Group Corporation summarising the complaints during the year. This will be based on an analysis of the year's complaints organised by curriculum area, category of complaint, and type of complainant.

**Checklist:**

**Impact on Students/Staff:** This document outlines the procedure for complaints from all customers including students

**Impact on Diversity:** This procedure will be applied equally and fairly and it sets out a process that enables everyone to bring forward any complaint or comment or compliment that they might have

**Impact on PREVENT:** Outlines the procedure for making comments, complaints and compliments

**Impact on Health & Safety:** Outlines the procedure for making comments, complaints and compliments

**Impact on Data Protection/Freedom of Information:** Outlines the procedure for making comments, complaints and compliments and FoI requests

**Link with Strategic Plan:**

**Communication/Consultation Plan:** This procedure is well embedded and is available on Cloud. The updated policy will be emailed to all managers

**Process of review:** Procedure is reviewed annually based on the compliments/comments/complaint received and any customer feedback regarding the process and policy.

**Process of review of effectiveness:** As above

**Legal authority:** None

**Responsibility for maintaining this policy rests with:** Assistant Principal of Marketing and Business Development

**Links to other policies:** Complaints Flowchart