

Feedback and Complaints Procedure



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Author: Director of Brand and Learner Experience	Approved by: Corporation Board Date: 03.07.2024
Analysis of effects on equality completed by: Positive About Inclusion	Analysis of effects on equality completed on: 03.06.2024

Monitor Changes

Version Level	Details of Change	Date
01	New procedure – this procedure succeeds and amalgamates the previous Complaints Procedures relating to: • Former Students • Members of the Public • Students and Customers • Corporation or a Corporation Member or the Clerk • Commercial Partners • Executive Team • Third Party / Agency Staff	December 2023

01 Aims and Objectives

At Gateshead College we're committed to providing excellent education, training and support services. Sometimes things do go wrong and, when this happens, we encourage learners and service users to bring their concerns to our attention. We welcome all feedback to help us improve the experience for everyone.

We want this procedure to be accessible to everyone and to make it easy for you share your feedback with us. If you need this information in a different format or language, would like someone to help explain it to you or require any other support please let us know by emailing feedback@gateshead.ac.uk or calling 0191 490 0300.

02 Scope

This procedure is to be used by anyone other than employees of Gateshead College if they want to submit feedback about the college and the services it provides. This includes learners, parents, members of the public, employers, third party & agency staff, and visitors to the college. This includes positive feedback, concerns and complaints.

If you are an employee of the college, please refer to the Grievance Procedure (Staff).

Key search words for this document

Compliments, Complaints, Feedback

1. Positive Feedback

We welcome positive feedback from all users of our services and our community. This is used to recognise and celebrate good work, share best practice and helps us to make continuous improvements. Positive feedback can be submitted by completing this [form](#).

2. Complaints

We are committed to investigating and resolving concerns and complaints fairly, quickly, and respectfully using this procedure. Most concerns and complaints can be resolved informally and learners and other users of our services are encouraged to raise concerns or give feedback as early as possible to help us resolve things as quickly as we can.

2.1. The Complaint Procedure

The procedure has three stages:

1. Informal
2. Formal
3. Appeal

When investigating a complaint, we will work to the following principles:

- In the first instance, complaints will be considered and dealt with as informally as possible by the manager in the area relating to the complaint.
- Complainants will be supported throughout the process and we will ensure it is accessible to everyone.
- Complaints will be dealt with in a fair, transparent and timely manner and in line with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- Complaints are considered in confidence and information is disclosed only with those who need to investigate it or respond to the issues raised. The College will manage the complaint in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.
- Complainants will not be victimised or disadvantaged for bringing a complaint.
- Complaints will be monitored and reported to the College's Senior Managers and Executive Team to gain an understanding of any trends emerging and where any improvements can be made
- Where an investigation identifies any improvements, we will take steps to implement these as soon as possible.
- Throughout the process, the focus will be on resolving issues not apportioning blame.
- Where a complaint is made by a learner, the College is only permitted to share details of a complaint with a parent or carer/guardian who have parental responsibility, this is for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the learner's welfare and complying with the Data Protection Act 2018.

If your complaint is about the Senior Team, CEO/Principal, or members of the Governing body please refer to **section 5**.

2.1.1. Stage 1 - Informal

Learners and other service users are encouraged to resolve issues informally before they become a complaint.

Concerns should be raised directly to the manager who, in your opinion, has responsibility for the area of your concern. This could include a Head of Department /Curriculum Leader or Service Manager. If you are unsure who to speak to, please forward this to feedback@gateshead.ac.uk or call us on 0191 490 0300.

Whilst this is an informal stage, the issue will be recorded, indicating the nature of complaint, date it was raised, the resolution and date closed.

You will be provided with a response within 15 working days of receipt.

2.1.2. Stage 2 - Formal

Where a complaint has not been satisfactorily resolved or dealt with appropriately at Stage 1, you may choose to progress the complaint to Stage 2.

Requests for Stage 2 formal complaints can be submitted by:

- Completing the Complaints Form [here](#).
- This will help us capture all the important information we need to respond.
- If you are not able to complete this for any reason, you can email us at the following email address feedback@gateshead.ac.uk or call the College on 0191 490 0300 and we can take the details.

Clearly identify the nature of your complaint at Stage 1, including what has been done to attempt to resolve it with the Curriculum/Service area. This should be submitted within 10 working days of receiving the response at Stage 1.

We will send an acknowledgement within 5 working days of receiving the Stage 2 complaint.

A manager will be identified to investigate the complaint.

As part of a Stage 2 complaint we may request additional information. If this is the case, we would expect to receive this within 10 working days from the date of our request. Whilst waiting for further information, the response time will be placed on hold until the information has been provided.

We aim to provide you with a formal response within 15 working days of the complaint (or where applicable) of additional information being received.

If we are unable to do this, we will keep you informed of our progress.

2.1.3 Stage 3 Appeal

Where you feel a complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily or dealt with appropriately at Stage 2 you may choose to progress your complaint to Stage 3, which is the final stage of the Gateshead College Feedback and Complaints procedure. This should be made in writing within 10 working days of when the Stage 2 response was received.

You should explain why the outcome of the Stage 2 process is not satisfactory or been dealt with appropriately, and what you would like us to do next. Correspondence for Stage 3 should be emailed to feedback@gateshead.ac.uk.

At Stage 3, the complaint will be reviewed and investigated by an individual who is more senior than those individuals who have previously been involved in the process and who is independent of the original decision.

This person will consider if:

- The correct procedure at Stage 1 and 2 has been followed.
- If any new material is available which was not previously reasonably available.

We will send an acknowledgement of your complaint within 5 working days of receipt of your appeal and we aim to provide a response to your Stage 3 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint (or where applicable) of the additional information being received.

Where a request for a Stage 3 review is received outside of the timescale specified above, you are required to provide a compelling reason, supported by independent evidence, which demonstrates why you were unable to submit a request for a Stage 3 review within the timescale specified following the conclusion of Stage 2.

Late requests for a Stage 3 review will be considered on an individual basis and acceptance will be at the discretion of the Director of Brand and Learner Experience (or appointed deputy lead).

This ends the Gateshead College Feedback and Complaints Procedure.

- 2.1.4 Subject to the procedure set out at 9.2, provided that the College has followed this procedure and has taken such steps as are reasonable in the circumstances to identify evidence that is relevant to the complaint, there will be no right for you to seek to have the complaint reinvestigated in any circumstances.
- 2.1.5 Any further dealings or correspondence with any third party relating to the complaint shall not create grounds for the complaint to be reconsidered, provided that this procedure has been properly followed (unless the College is legally required to reconsider any matter relating to this complaint by law or by any regulatory body acting within its powers).

3. Timescales

3.1. We have provided an estimation of the timescales involved at each stage of the process and will try to the best of our ability to meet these. In exceptional circumstances resolving a complaint under this procedure may take longer than predicted. Where this is the case, we will update you in a timely manner of any delays and the reason(s) for such delays, if appropriate.

Stage 1 Informal	Response in 15 working days from date the complaint is received.
Stage 2 Formal	Complainant submits complaint within 10 working days of receiving the response at Stage 1. College acknowledge complaint within 5 working days. If additional information required, complainant should submit this within 10 working days of the request being made. College will provide response in 15 working days of the complaint (or where applicable) of the additional information being received.
Stage 3 Appeal	Complainant submits appeal within 10 working days of receiving Stage 2 response. College acknowledge appeal within 5 working days. If additional information required, complainant should submit this within 10 working days of the request being made. College will provide response in 20 working days of the complaint (or where applicable) of the additional information being received.
QIA/ESFA	If following the completion of the College's procedure, the complainant escalates their complaint to the ESFA or QIA, their procedure will be followed from that point forward.

4. Information and Data

- 4.1. All records and data relating to complaints kept by the College in the complaints log and elsewhere will be kept and stored in accordance with applicable data protection principles, and will be retained for at least three years following the conclusion or resolution of the complaint.
- 4.2. Whilst any complaint is being considered under this procedure, you must not publish, discuss, or otherwise refer to the complaint or its subject matter on any form of media, including social media, or encourage or facilitate any third party in doing so.
- 4.3. Any contravention of this restriction may impact on our ability to investigate the matter independently and in accordance with this procedure.
- 4.4. This may result in the individual considering the complaint at the relevant stage to conclude that the College is no longer prepared to investigate the complaint, or that such a disclosure is evidence of vexatious or malicious practice.
- 4.5. Any personal data held by the College during the course of or as a result of any activity under this Complaints Procedure will be held in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, or any legislation replacing this.

5. Complaint about the Senior Team, CEO/Principal, Chair or other member of the Governing Body

- 5.1. If your complaint is about a Deputy Principal, the Director of Governance and Compliance, or member of the Executive Team please send an email detailing your complaint to Principal@gateshead.ac.uk.
- 5.2. If your complaint is about the Principal/CEO, please send an email detailing your complaint to Clerk@gateshead.ac.uk who will pass your complaint onto the Chair of the Board.
- 5.3. If your complaint is about the Chair of the Board or member of the Governing Body please send an email detailing your complaint to Clerk@gateshead.ac.uk.
- 5.4. Timescales and the procedure for response will follow as closely as possible to the ones described previously.

6. Accessibility

- 6.1. We will make sure our complaints procedure is published and reviewed regularly and that the guidance is clear and easy to locate on the College Website.
- 6.2. It is open to anyone to make a complaint. Complainants may appoint a representative to assist them during the complaints process. This person must not be acting in a legal capacity.
- 6.3. We will be responsive to the accessibility requirements of any complainant. If you need this information in a different format or language, would like someone to help explain it to you or require any other support please let us know by emailing feedback@gateshead.ac.uk or calling 0191 490 0300.

7. Fairness and Independence

- 7.1. We are committed to ensuring the process for investigating complaints is fair.
- 7.2. Staff involved in the investigation of complaints will be appropriately trained and should not have a direct connection to the complainant or the area about which the complaint has been made.
- 7.3. There should be no bias in the investigation process, perceived or actual.
- 7.4. Students will not be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint.
- 7.5. Anonymised statements are not accepted as part of the investigation process.
- 7.6. The response to a complaint will give clear reasons for the outcome.

8. Confidentiality

- 8.1. Confidentiality can be expected in that the investigation of a complaint should not affect a learner's educational experience.
- 8.2. Any person submitting information must be made aware that their statement and identity may be disclosed to the other parties to the complaint.

9. Other information

9.1. Further Education

For Further Education courses if you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 3 process, you have the opportunity to escalate your complaint (where

procedures allow) to the appropriate awarding body or the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

For further information, please visit the [ESFA complaints procedure](#).

9.2. Higher Education

In certain circumstances if, after seeking resolution at Stage 3, you are still not satisfied, you have the right to request a final review by our partner universities or higher education awarding body. It is normally a requirement of Gateshead College partner universities and awarding bodies that a complaint has completed Stage 1, 2 and 3 of the College's Feedback and Complaints procedure. Please note that partner universities or higher education awarding bodies will normally only accept requests for escalation if the complaint relates to an aspect of service which the partner university or awarding body has whole or partial responsibility.

If this doesn't resolve the issue, you can raise the matter with the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#) (OIA). The OIA is an independent organisation that considers student complaints.

04 Related Documents

Grievance Procedure (Staff)