

# Higher Education Feedback Policy: Compliments and Complaints

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## Introduction

As a valued customer of Burton and South Derbyshire College (BSDC) we aim to provide you with a service that meets and exceeds your needs, as well as offering value for money. Our Higher Education Feedback Policy aims to assure you of our commitment to delivering and maintaining a high-quality student experience including during the Covid-19 pandemic. We support social distancing and anticipate social distancing measures will be in place for some time for the safety of students and staff. BSDC and its validating partners and awarding bodies, including Staffordshire University, are working towards a digital- first education, and a connected student experience.

We accept that sometimes we do not quite get things right and when this happens, we would like to hear about it so we can try to address the issue and make sure it does not happen again. There are a number of informal channels, such as speaking to a member of staff at the time, which we expect would usually lead to resolution of the problem. However, if a customer feels it is necessary to pursue a complaint formally, they can be assured that we will treat it seriously, fairly, and impartially. Feedback Forms are available at each College site if requested.

## 2. Scope

All BSDC Higher Education (HE) compliments, comments, feedback, and complaints are managed by this feedback Policy. Appeals against higher education academic decisions will follow the Higher Education Academic Appeals Policy, which is available on the College website.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of your complaint after following Burton and South Derbyshire processes, then you can either complain directly to Staffordshire University or Pearson.

If after following these procedures, you are still unhappy with the outcome you may be able to ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) to review your complaint. The OIA runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. Burton and South Derbyshire College is a member of this scheme. You can find more information about making a complaint to the OIA, what it can and can't look at and what it can do to put things right [here](#). You will need to have completed the BSDC procedure before you complain to the OIA. We will send you a letter called a "Completion of Procedures Letter" when you have reached the end of our processes and there are no further steps you can take internally. If your complaint is not upheld, we will issue you with a Completion of Procedures Letter automatically. If your complaint is upheld or partly upheld, you can ask for a Completion of Procedures Letter if you want one. You can find more information about Completion of Procedures, letters and when you should expect to receive one [here](#)

Issues should be raised, and complaints should be made as soon as possible after the event, action or concern causing dissatisfaction. Complaints from former learners will be considered if they relate directly to the services received as a learner at BSDC and provided that the complaint is initiated within three months of the completion of study.

People often feel more comfortable about suggesting improvements to a service than formally complaining, so should any stakeholder wish to make a suggestion to support the continuous improvement at BSDC this can be done as follows:

- Speaking to the Customer Experience Team Leader.
- Email your suggestion to our Customer Experience Team Leader at [feedback@bsdc.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@bsdc.ac.uk)
- Write a letter to the Customer Experience Team Leader **at Burton and South Derbyshire college, Lichfield Street, Burton on Trent, Staffs, DE14 3RL.**
- Telephone the Customer Experience Team on **01283 494400.**

## 3. Definitions

BSDC defines compliments, comments, feedback, and complaints as follows:

- A compliment is defined as a polite expression of praise or admiration and can be communicated orally or in a written form, such as a formal letter, email or thank you card.
- A comment is defined as a verbal or written remark expressing an opinion or reaction.
- Feedback would generally be information about reactions to a product, service or a person's performance of a task, which is used as a basis for improvement, development (constructive feedback) or praise (positive feedback), which would not necessarily require a formal response.
- A complaint is defined as an oral or written expression statement that an aspect of a service or facility is

unsatisfactory or unacceptable which requires a response (either informal or formal).

#### **4. General principles in relation to complaints are:**

- The College is committed to providing the highest quality of service which aims to meet and preferably exceed the expectations of all customers.
- Users of the College have the right to complain if they are dissatisfied and should expect to be dealt with fairly, amicably, and quickly.
- Decisions taken as the result of an investigation will be balanced and reasonable.
- No learner bringing a complaint under this procedure, whether successfully or otherwise, will be disadvantaged. Should evidence to the contrary be found the matter will be fully investigated and if necessary disciplinary proceedings may be taken.
- The College will not tolerate aggressive behaviour, bad language, racist, sexist, and discriminatory comments towards employees. Should such circumstances occur, the College may prematurely conclude progressing the complaint. Where this is the case the complainant will have the opportunity to appeal against this decision (following the appeals process identified within this policy), however, previous aggressive or abusive responses may be taken into consideration and could affect the final outcome.
- The College may consider invoking the disciplinary procedures under the Learner Disciplinary Policy in those cases where complaints are found to be vexatious or malicious. A vexatious or malicious complaint is defined as a complaint which is patently unsustainable, having been put forward to abuse the process of the Complaints Policy or, for example, to attempt to defame the name or character of another person.
- All College staff have the right not to be subjected to aggressive, offensive, or abusive actions, language, or behaviour, regardless of the circumstances. The College will take the minimum action required to address such unacceptable behaviour, for example:
  - require that contact is made with a specified member of staff only
  - terminate an abusive telephone call
  - decline to accept telephone calls but maintaining at least one form of contact.
- Where the same complaint is raised by a number of individuals at a similar time, this will be treated as a single complaint.
- Where possible if a suggestion or issue is raised early, this can be logged as a Stage 1 pre complaint and we will endeavour to resolve any concerns before going down the necessary channels of a formal complaint.

#### **5. Key Responsibilities**

##### **The Customer Experience Team Leader is responsible for:**

- Ensuring that this policy is available to all HE College users
- Logging compliments, comments, feedback and complaints and monitoring response times
- Supporting the Investigating / Appeals Officer as required
- Recording and reporting on the outcomes of formal complaints
- Ensuring that annual formal reports produced for the College Management Team are securely stored for a maximum of 5 years plus the current year in line with our Record Retention Policy
- Ensuring all complainants are made aware of their right to the erasure of personal data. (Personal data is kept for three years unless the complainant requests that their data is destroyed).

##### **The complainant will be expected to:**

- Bring the complaint to the attention of BSDC, as quickly and as practicably possible
- Explain the problem as clearly and fully as possible, including outlining any action that may have been taken to date
- Allow the college reasonable time to investigate the complaint
- Recognise that some circumstances are beyond the control of the College.

## Compliments

All compliments are logged with the Customer Experience Team. The compliment will be sent to the relevant area. Positive feedback may be used in College literature, Team Talk and future publications, adhering to GDPR regulations.

## Responsibility for action

The Customer Experience Team Leader will designate the appropriate investigator.

### The Investigating / Appeals Officer is responsible for:

- Carrying out a full and balanced investigation into the complaint / appeal
- Complying with the timescale for completion
- Providing a written response to the Complaints team
- Keeping the Complaints team updated regarding all aspects of the investigation.

## 6. Procedures

### Action on receipt of a complaint:

#### Stage 1 – Informal resolution (Pre-Complaint)

BSDC recognises that concerns may be raised informally and can and should be dealt with immediately by the relevant staff member. The aim is for the staff member to work with the complainant on an informal basis to resolve concerns quickly and simply.

No formal responses are necessarily required for informal complaints. Where appropriate, staff should make recommendations for improvement within their own area when they have resolved an informal complaint. However, if concerns are not satisfactorily resolved in this way complainants may follow the College's formal procedures for handling complaints – as specified below.

#### Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

The Customer Experience Team will record the complaint details with agreed response dates. The complaint will be advised of the agreed response time and the name of the Manager assigned to investigate within five working days of the College receiving the complaint. All appeals against progression panel outcomes will be dealt with by the relevant curriculum manager or designated member of the team.

Where a complaint relates to Higher Apprenticeships provision activity the complaint will be referred to the Director for Apprenticeships or a designated member of this team.

Where a complaint relates to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment the complaint will be referred to the Director of Quality and Performance.

Where a complaint relates to the withdrawal from a Higher Education course with associated fees the complaint will be referred to the Withdrawal Committee chaired by the Vice Principal and Executive Director Curriculum and Quality.

There may be occasions when the relevant manager is unable to respond promptly, for example during the summer holiday period when the duty manager will respond in their absence. The Customer Experience Team will confirm by email to the staff member the agreed response date and monitor the complaint, advising the complainant if necessary if we are unable to keep to the response time. The person(s) responsible for the investigation will respond directly with the complainant informing them of the outcome of the investigation. For recording purposes, a copy of the letter/email will be sent to the Customer Experience Team.

Once resolved all correspondence and notes provided by the complainant will be stored safely and confidentially for three years, in line with our record retention policy and will not be shared with any other party. The complainant

can request at any time, via [feedback@bsdc.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@bsdc.ac.uk) that all documentation in relation to their complaint is destroyed. Where a complaint is made directly to the Principal and Chief Executive, procedures as above will be followed.

The Customer Experience Team may contact the complainant via email or letter within 5 to 10 working days after the final report, to ask the complainant if they are satisfied with the outcome of the complaint and to rate our service.

## **Confidentiality**

If specific information within a complaint is to be kept confidential, the customer should make this clear to the person to whom a complaint is made. In exceptional circumstances it may be difficult for confidentiality to be upheld, for instance where a criminal offence or potential gross misconduct has been disclosed. In these circumstances the demand for confidentiality may make it difficult for the College to assist them with their complaint or to resolve it. Disciplinary procedures may be invoked at this stage.

Learners 16 years and over are protected as adults by the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

## **Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults**

Where there is a suspicion of abuse of a child or vulnerable adult the College has a legal obligation to report this. Disclosures of this nature to any members of staff (including the College Counselling Service) may not remain confidential, as the person “at risk” will require safeguarding. Referral should be made to the College Safeguarding Team – John Beaty, Deputy Principal: Corporate Relationships is the Designated Safeguarding Lead. A safeguarding officer can be located by a member of the Customer Experience Team.

## **7. Formal Stage 2 - Appealing against the outcome of feedback**

Should the person receiving feedback from their complaint feel that the original investigation has overlooked any part of their complaint or has not considered relevant evidence that supports their complaint, they have the right to appeal the outcome of the investigation into their original complaint.

In order to appeal, contact should be made within 10 working days of receiving the outcome of the original complaint. The appeal should clarify, in writing, the dissatisfaction with the outcome. The Customer Experience Team Leader will appoint the Assistant Principal and Dean to hear the appeal.

The Appeal Chair will review the response. Wherever possible, we will seek to respond to any appeal within 10 working days of written receipt. Once concluded, The Appeal Chair will make direct contact with the appellant outlining the outcome of their findings and/or any remedial or corrective action that might be being pursued.

Staff working at BSDC will always strive to ensure that we respond positively to promote customer satisfaction. There may however be a small number of occasions where mutual resolve is not possible regardless of appeal. Examples of this may include;

- a. Involvement of external third parties not in control of BSDC.
- b. Legalities such as data protection not allowing a full account of any corrective action to be given.
- c. Unrealistic expectations of response.

Wherever possible, our resources are focused on supporting the progress of all of our learners. To this end, should we exhaust the above process and be unable to reach a mutually convenient resolve, or should the complainant’s expectations of resolve be unrealistic, we will write to the party, outlining all corrective action to date and state that we are closing the complaint.

Should further persistent and unreasonable requests for action consume significant resources or risk damaging the College's reputation, and we have done all in our power to seek mutual resolve, we may secure the support of third parties in seeking closure.

## **8. Reporting**

The Customer Experience Team Leader will produce an annual report for the College Management Team providing anonymous details of complaints received in the preceding academic year. The report will provide a breakdown by provision type, gender, age, ethnicity, and disability.

Appendix A – Complaints can be dealt with either informally via Stage One or for more serious complaints Stage Two.

