



HEART OF
**WORCESTERSHIRE
COLLEGE**

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE 2025-28 HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)

For completion by The Executive

Strategic Theme (7Ps)	Purpose	X	Place	X	People	X	Prosper	X
	Partnership		Potential	x	Planet			
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Purpose

This policy outlines the Colleges approach to managing and responding to internal and external complaints within Higher Education (HE)

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Students enrolled on a higher education course or professional award at level 4 or higher.

3. Policy Statement

The College places significant emphasis on customer feedback and views all complaints as a valuable tool to drive improvements in the quality of our services. The College complaints procedure is clear and sensitive to issues of confidentiality. Complaints are strictly monitored by the Vice Principal - Quality on all our campuses and are regularly analysed and reported to both senior managers and the Corporation.

We value feedback and expect to use it to help us to:

- Get things right in the future.
- Be more open and accountable.
- Act fairly and proportionately.
- Seek continuous improvement.

When we get things wrong, we will act to:

- Accept responsibility and apologise.
- Explain what went wrong and put things right.
- Learn lessons from mistakes and change policies and practices where proportionate to do so.

We conduct a “Lessons Learnt” review from every issue raised and then summarise this annually, to aid our improvement plans.

4. Definitions

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more persons about the provider’s action, lack of action, or the standard of service, which has negatively affected the complainant’s experience

Complainant: The individual or group raising the complaint. This can be:

- A learner
- A parent/carer
- A member of the public or service user

Informal complaint:

A process where the complaint is addressed quickly and simply, often through direct communication with staff or tutors, without initiating the formal complaints procedure.

Formal Complaint

A written complaint submitted through the College official procedure, often requiring completion of a form and supporting evidence, which initiates a formal review process that results in a written response.

5. Roles and Responsibilities**5.1 Governing Body**

Ensure the policy aligns with relevant legislation and is effectively implemented.

5.2 Principal and Senior Leaders

Ensure the policy aligns with relevant legislation and guidance, with regular reviews of the policy. Oversee and ensure the policy is effectively implemented.

5.3 Staff

Comply with the policy and participate in relevant training.

5.4 Students

To follow the procedure when submitting a complaint

6. Procedures

Heart of Worcestershire College is committed to providing quality services to all its users, and to responding in a timely and fair manner to any complaints raised. This procedure is designed to ensure an accessible, clear, accurate and fair process in which to raise a complaint. All complaints are carefully and fully considered. The procedure takes into consideration the 'Good Practice Framework' of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Competition and Markets Authority's advice for UK higher education providers.

This procedure applies to all complaints within Higher Education (HE) at the College. Please refer to the Further Education (FE) Complaints procedure for complaints relating to FE.

During holiday periods, in particular the extended break during the summer, it may not be possible to adhere to the timescales set out in the procedure below. In such cases, the complainant will be informed of any possible delays and will be updated in regard to any progress made and a planned timescale for resolution. The college will endeavour to resolve any complaints received during these periods as quickly as possible.

Complaints must be registered within the academic year in which they take place. In the majority of cases the deadline for submitting a complaint will be 31st July of each academic year. Where courses run across academic years it will be one calendar month after the registered end date of the course.

The College will not normally investigate any complaints made more than three months after the incident. Any complaints received outside of this timeframe will be reviewed by a Vice Principal who will make a decision whether or not to proceed with an investigation.

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

The **complaints procedure** is designed to address issues including (but not exclusively):

- Dissatisfaction with tuition or student support
- Standard of College services
- Actions or omissions of the College or its staff
- Incidents of discrimination, harassment or abuse including those based on the 'protected characteristics' of the Equality Act 2010

We value feedback and expect to use it to help us to:

- get things right in the future
- be more open and accountable
- act fairly and proportionately
- seek continuous improvement

When we get things wrong we will act to:

- accept responsibility and apologise
- explain what went wrong and put things right
- learn lessons from mistakes and change policies and practices where proportionate to do so
- We conduct a "Lessons Learnt" review from every issue raised and then summarise this annually, to aid our improvement plans

Please note that the [HE Assessment Protocol](#) should be used where you wish to challenge academic or decisions or allegations of academic misconduct

Informal

In the first instance we encourage you to seek a resolution with the academic or support team with the problem exists. This is often the quickest and most efficient way to resolve any issues you may have. If the complaint relates to a specific individual, you should attempt to approach this individual in the first instance. Alternatively, you may approach the Curriculum Manager for Higher Education or Curriculum Manager or Director , of the relevant curriculum area or Corporate Service Team. Any such issues at this informal stage should be raised no later than 6 weeks after the incident occurred). Should these issues not be resolved informally, they become formal complaints (Stage 1).

STAGE 1 (Formal)

You may make a formal complaint by completing the specified HE Formal Complaint Stage 1 form (appendix 1) below, also located on the College website [student-he-complaints-form-stage-1.docx](#) Once completed please submit the form to Quality quality@howcollege.ac.uk

You will receive an acknowledgement within **5 working** days upon receipt of your complaint.

The complaint will be investigated by the department/area with the aim to respond to the issue raised within **10 working days**. The outcome of the investigation is to be recorded and forwarded to Quality who will be kept informed throughout the investigation process.

Quality will ensure that the outcome of the investigation is communicated in writing within **3 further working days**. Copies of this will be sent to the relevant members of staff.

STAGE 2 (Appeal)

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 response, you may appeal, by submitting the specified HE Stage 2 appeal form (appendix 2) also located on the College website [student-he-complaints-form-appeal-stage-2.docx](#), within **10 working days** of receipt of the outcome. Once completed please submit the form to Quality quality@howcollege.ac.uk

If an appeal is received within this timeframe, the **Vice Principal** Quality will appoint the Curriculum Manager for Higher Education or Curriculum Manager from another curriculum area or Director to undertake an independent investigation. This investigation should report back to the **Quality** within **10 working days**

The outcome of the appeal will be sent to the complainant in writing within **5 working days** of the conclusion of the review.

STAGE 3 (Formal Referral)

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal a formal referral can be submitted using the specified HE Stage 3 Referral Form (appendix 3) also located on the College website [student-he-complaints-formal-referral-stage-3.docx](#) within **5 working days**. Once completed please submit the form to Quality quality@howcollege.ac.uk. A **Vice Principal** may then arrange a hearing and a final decision will be made

▪ . Final decision

The **Vice Principal** will send the outcome of the formal referral to the complainant in writing within **10 working days** of the appeal hearing. The complainant will be informed at this stage of further avenues of appeal if dissatisfied with the outcome of the College process.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. Heart of Worcestershire College is a member of this scheme. If you are unhappy with the outcome, you may be able to ask the OIA to review your HE complaint. 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: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>.

You normally need to have completed the HE Complaints Procedure before you complain to the OIA. Heart of Worcestershire College 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 HE Complaint is not upheld, Heart of Worcestershire College will issue you with a Completion of Procedures Letter automatically. If your HE 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: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters>.

UNIVERSITY AND PROFESSIONAL BODY PROCEDURES

Students enrolled on a higher education course validated by or franchised from a University partner should consult the University regulations. Where the University stipulates that students should follow the College complaints procedure in the first instance, then the above procedure must be followed.

Students enrolled on a professional award should consult the regulations of the professional body as above.

Where the University or professional body complaints procedure is to be followed in the first instance, that procedure supersedes the College procedure contained within this document.

Questions and Advice

If you have any questions about the complaints procedure, you should contact:

- A member of staff from within the academic team
- The College Customer Services Team
- Quality

The contact details for Quality are as follows:

Quality
Heart of Worcestershire College
All Saints' Building
Deansway
Worcester
WR1 2JF
E-mail: quality@howcollege.ac.uk
Telephone: 01905 743520

Additional Notes

The Academic Board of Heart of Worcestershire College has oversight of all HE complaints. The Board will review progress of all Higher Education complaints and oversee changes to College policy which result from the complaints process.

The timeframes set out above represent the optimum and expected response times for the majority of complaints. At times where it is necessary to gather the views of external agencies

or individuals outside of the college, timeframes may be affected. Complainants will be informed of these delays and provided with new expected timeframes.

7. Monitoring and Review

- Procedure to be reviewed every 3 years

8. Legal and Regulatory Framework

- The Equality Act 2010.
- Condition E6: Harassment and sexual misconduct

9. Training and Awareness

HE staff are regularly trained and updated on changes to the regulations set by the Office for Students and good practice outlined by the Office for Independent Adjudicator, including any impact on this or other relevant policies.

10. Environmental Impact/Sustainability Considerations (if applicable)

We encourage the submission and handling of complaints through digital platforms to reduce paper usage and minimise environmental impact. Printed materials will be used only when necessary or requested for accessibility reasons.

11. Legal Requirements/Issues outside of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The College must comply with the **UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** and the **Data Protection Act 2018**.

12. Equality Impact Assessment Statement

The Equality Act 2010 does not require public authorities to carry out EIAs by law. The College does however, carefully consider the impact, when creating or amending its policies, on all concerned parties regarding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and records this at ELT meetings in order to demonstrate compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

13. Related Policies and Documents

Equality & Diversity Policy
HE Fees Policy
GDPR Policy
Student Standards
Safeguarding Policy
HE & Professional Admissions Policy
HE Assessment Protocol

14. Appendices

Appendix 1

Student HE Complaints Form (Stage 1)

We encourage you in the first instance to seek a resolution with the teaching or corporate service area principally involved with your issue. This is often the quickest and most efficient way to resolve any issues you have. If, however, you are still dissatisfied, then please complete this form and submit to Quality quality@howcollege.ac.uk

YOUR DETAILS

In this section we ask for your information to help us communicate with you about your complaint.

Our default method of communication will be via email. If you would prefer to receive correspondence via post, please tick this box. ☐

By leaving the box unticked you are agreeing to receive correspondence from us via email.

First Name:		Surname:	
Address Line:			
		Postcode:	
Telephone No:		Email:	
Student ID number:		Course Title:	
Student Date of Birth:		Where a student is over 18 years of age, the College will request the student's permission to pursue the complaint when parents/guardians (or other third parties with a close connection) make a complaint on the student's behalf. Permission must be received from the student in writing prior to the commencement of any investigation.	

Have you tried to resolve the issue informally?
Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'yes' what has been the response to your complaint? If 'no', you are encouraged to seek a resolution with the teaching or corporate service area principally involved with your issue.

Please give a complete and thorough account of your complaint. Please include details of the services or staff members involved, what happened and when, and reference any supporting evidence that you would like to provide (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Full name (capitals):			
Signature:		Date:	

Appendix 2

Student HE Complaints Form Appeal (Stage 2)

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 response, you may submit an appeal by completing this form, outlining your grounds for appeal, ***within 10 working days*** of receipt of the outcome. Please complete this form and submit to the Quality quality@howcollege.ac.uk

If an appeal is received within this timeframe the Curriculum Manager for Higher Education or a Curriculum Director will be appointed to review the appeal and carry out an independent investigation.

This investigation should report back to Quality ***within 10 working days***. The outcome of the appeal will be sent to the complainant in writing ***within 5 working days***.

First Name:		Surname:	
Address Line:			
		Postcode:	
Telephone No:		Email:	
Student ID number:		Course Title:	
Student Date of Birth:		Where a student is over 18 years of age, the College will request the student's permission to pursue the complaint when parents/guardians (or other third parties with a close connection) make a complaint on the student's behalf. Permission must be received from the student in writing prior to the commencement of any investigation.	

Stage 1 Investigating Officer:		Date of Stage 1 Outcome Letter:	
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Grounds for Appeal - please select as appropriate:
New evidence has come to light that was not or could not have been available during the Stage 1 investigation ☐
There is evidence that the Stage 1 investigation has not been conducted properly e.g. administration ☐
There is evidence that the judgement reached at Stage 1 was biased or unfair ☐

Please provide an explanation for your grounds for appeal. Please attach any supporting evidence. (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Full name (capitals):			
Signature:		Date:	

Appendix 3

Student HE Complaints Formal Referral (Stage 3)

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 response, you may submit a formal referral by completing this form, outlining your grounds, ***within 5 working days*** of receipt of the outcome. Please submit completed form to Quality quality@howcollege.ac.uk

A **Vice Principal** may then arrange a hearing and a final decision will be made. The **Vice Principal** will send the outcome of the formal referral to the complainant in writing within **10 working days** of the appeal hearing. The complainant will be informed at this stage of further avenues of appeal if dissatisfied with the outcome of the College process.

First Name:		Surname:	
Address Line:			
		Postcode:	
Telephone No:		Email:	
Student ID number:		Course Title:	
Student Date of Birth:		Where a student is over 18 years of age, the College will request the student's permission to pursue the complaint when parents/guardians (or other third parties with a close connection) make a complaint on the student's behalf. Permission must be received from the student in writing prior to the commencement of any investigation.	

Stage 2 Investigating Officer:		Date of Stage 2 Outcome Letter:	
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Grounds for Formal Referral - please select as appropriate:
New evidence has come to light that was not or could not have been available during the Stage 2 investigation ☐
There is evidence that the Stage 2 investigation has not been conducted properly e.g. administration ☐
There is evidence that the judgement reached at Stage 2 was biased or unfair ☐

Please provide an explanation for your grounds for a formal referral. Please attach any supporting evidence. (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Full name (capitals):			
Signature:		Date:	