

## South Thames Colleges Group

### FEEDBACK & COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

#### 1. Policy statement

Quality of service is an important measure of the effectiveness of public bodies. Therefore, we believe that learning from feedback is a powerful way of helping the South Thames Colleges Group to improve our services and increase trust amongst the people who use our services.

We treat a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, from a user of or partner to the South Thames Colleges Group.

#### Our policy covers feedback about:

- a) The standard of service we provide
- b) The behaviour of our staff, and
- c) Any action or lack of action by the South Thames Colleges Group

#### Our policy covers feedback received from:

- a) Enrolled learners
- b) Applicants
- c) Parents/carers
- d) Employers or other users of Group services and facilities
- e) Members of the public

#### Our policy does not cover:

- a) Complaints of a minor nature which should be dealt with locally within Schools, Curriculum Areas and/or Directorates
- b) Comments about our policies or policy decisions
- c) Dissatisfaction with our policies or decisions about individual cases or grants or requests for legal assistance
- d) Matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaints procedure
- e) Complaints raised by students, or their parents/sponsors where fees have not been paid in full or an instalment plan not complied with
- f) Anonymous complaints, although we may investigate
- g) Abusive and/or overly persistent complainant behaviour containing, for example, offensive language which we will not progress or take seriously and reserve the right to take action against the perpetrator(s)
- h) Staff complaints, as there are more appropriate HR procedures to use
- i) Complaints about academic assessment (covered by the Assessment Policy)
- j) Applicant appeals (covered by the Admissions Policy)
- k) Complaints made outside the response time limit of 12 months since the issue originally occurred
- l) Complaints that have been disposed of in court or tribunal proceedings bought by the complainant or under settlement agreement between the complainant and the Group.

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### The stages of the complaints procedure

We have a two-stage complaints procedure. At each stage it will help us to resolve your complaint quickly if you can give us as much clear detail as possible, including any supporting documents and correspondence and stating that you are making a complaint in line with our procedure.

It is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved satisfactorily and on an informal basis and close to their point of origin. Informal resolution is taken seriously by the Group; all staff have a responsibility for ensuring that complaints are dealt with in a supportive and courteous manner. Before moving to formal investigation, the Group will look at the means by which an informal resolution was attempted.

#### Stage 1

All formal complaints must be presented in writing and will be logged by the designated College Complaints Lead before being acknowledged. In the first instance, it will be forwarded to the relevant Head of School/Curriculum Manager or Director to investigate and resolve.

A record of any actions /correspondence/supporting evidence and outcome must be copied to the designated College Complaints Lead, filed and entered onto the Log.

This is the first opportunity for us to resolve your dissatisfaction, and the majority of complaints will be dealt with at this stage.

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days
- Full response within 20 working days

#### Stage 2

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request a review. To begin Stage 2 of the procedure, we require a written request made to the College Complaint Lead within five working days of you receiving your Stage 1 response.

An independent member of the management team will be nominated to formally investigate your complaint to date. A written response, detailing the findings of this investigation, will be sent to you along with a decision as to whether your complaint has been upheld. Please note that this decision is final and marks the end of our complaints process, there is no further right of appeal within the Group process.

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days
- Full response within 20 working days

### Extending time limits

We aim to complete all complaints within the timescales above; however, if a complaint is very complex, or is received during a holiday period, it may be necessary to extend the time limit. If this is the case, we will keep you informed of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and inform you of the new deadline.

If having followed the two stages of our complaints procedure you still remain dissatisfied, you can ask to have your complaint reviewed externally by an agency with no direct link to the Group. You would be

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advised by us of who this would be, which in most cases, will be the Education & Skills Funding Agency. For Higher Education students, if following the issue by the College of its “completion of procedure letter” the complaint has still not been resolved to your satisfaction, you can refer your complaint to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Students in Higher Education (OIA) (website <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>). The OIA is an independent body set up to review student complaints against Higher Education Providers in England and Wales and which is free to students).

Following any stage of the procedure, a complainant has a maximum of five days from the date of the final response to request that their complaint be progressed to the next stage.

### Our standards for handling complaints

We treat all complaints seriously provided that they are not made abusively or offensively and comply with the guidance above. You will be treated with courtesy and fairness at all times. We would hope, too, that you will be courteous and fair in your dealings with us at all times. We will treat your complaint in confidence within the Group and we will deal with your complaint promptly.

We will not treat you less favourably than anyone else because of your: sex or marital status: this includes family status, responsibility for dependants, and gender (including gender reassignment, whether proposed, commenced or completed) sexual orientation colour or race: this includes ethnic or national origin or nationality, disability, religious or political beliefs, trade union affiliation, or other unjustifiable factors, for example language difficulties or age.

### Confidentiality

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

### Remedies to complaints

When we get things wrong we will act to:

- a) Accept responsibility
- b) Explain what went wrong and why, and
- c) Put things right by making any changes required. The action we take to put matters right (i.e., redress) in response to a complaint, can include any combination of the remedies set out in the list below. The general principle we follow is that a complainant should, so far as possible, be put in the position he or she would have been in, had things not gone wrong.

The remedy we choose will be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in service, and take into account what people are looking for when they complain. An apology is normally appropriate, but other action may also be necessary.

- A sincere and meaningful apology (explaining what happened and/or what went wrong) – an apology is not an acceptance of liability under Section 2 of the Compensation Act 2006
- Remedial action, which may include reviewing or changing a decision on the service given to an individual complainant

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- Provide service desired by complainant (immediately, if appropriate)
- Putting things right (for example change of procedures to prevent future difficulties of a similar kind, either for the complainant or others)
- Training or supervising staff; or any combination of these

**Unreasonable behaviour**

All complaints will be processed in accordance with this policy. However, during this process, staff may have contact with unreasonable complainant behaviour and unreasonably persistent complainants. Where behaviour of this type occurs we reserve the right to end the process and reject the complaint. We believe it unreasonable too that a complaint is pursued by anyone owing the College fees, although we do have provision for those experiencing genuine hardship.

**Recording and monitoring complaints**

We will log the complaints we receive so that we can monitor the types of problems, the best way to sort them out and how long we are taking to deal with them. This also helps us to take a closer look at how we can improve our own service delivery. Quality and Innovation will analyse the following information on complainants (where available) to identify differences between groups: age, gender, ethnic origin, disability learning difference and school/curriculum area and mode of study. They will also report on the numbers and categories of complaints we receive to the Governing Body on an annual basis.

**Review**

This policy and procedure will be reviewed on an annual basis and will be available via the relevant College website.

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### Contacting us

All complaints and requests for review under our complaints policy and procedures should be sent to one of the following addresses:

#### For complaints related to Carshalton College

**Email:** [feedback@carshalton.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@carshalton.ac.uk)

**Post to:** Complaints  
Carshalton College  
Nightingale Road  
Carshalton  
SM5 2EJ

#### For complaints related to Kingston College

**Email:** [feedback@kingston-college.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@kingston-college.ac.uk)

**Post to:** Complaints  
Kingston College  
Kingston Hall Road  
Kingston upon Thames,  
Surrey, KT1 2AQ

#### For complaints related to South Thames College

**Email:** [feedback@south-thames.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@south-thames.ac.uk)

**Post to:** Complaints  
South Thames College  
Wandsworth High Street  
Wandsworth  
London, SW18 2PP

#### For complaints related to Merton College

**Email:** [feedback@merton.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@merton.ac.uk)

**Address:** Complaints  
South Thames College  
Executive Suite  
Wandsworth High Street  
London  
SW18 2PP