

Customer Complaints and Compliments

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure fairness and equity for all parties involved in the handling of complaints and to enable a balanced and objective approach to be taken so that a satisfactory conclusion can be reached. Complaints are valuable, welcome and important to us, and viewed as an opportunity to improve the quality of the student experience, ensuring it meets the college's high expectations.

2. Scope

The college defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction which merits a response.

These guidelines relate to:

- Courses, services or facilities provided by the College
- Action or lack of action taken by the College and its staff

The guidelines do not cover:

- Disciplinary issues
- Matters governed by other separate procedures such as harassment, appeals against exclusion or academic appeals

3. Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy lies with the Deputy/Vice Principal for Quality & MIS, supported by the Quality Director, Directors, Curriculum Managers and other Deputy/Vice Principals.

4. Procedure

4.1 Responding to Complaints

- 4.1.1 Should a concern regarding safeguarding or child protection be identified as part of, or as a result of reporting or investigating a complaint, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will be informed. The Safeguarding and Prevent Policy will be used to follow procedure for investigating a safeguarding or child protection concern in partnership with external agencies where appropriate.
- 4.1.2 Every reasonable effort will be made to deal promptly and efficiently with all complaints, to investigate them thoroughly and objectively and to seek to resolve them satisfactorily. Whilst every complaint is taken seriously and investigated fully, every effort is also made to ensure that staff of the college understands that they have equal rights in the process and that they are treated with fairness and objectivity.
- 4.1.2 Complaints will be dealt with positively, constructively and as far as possible confidentially. If a complaint is upheld the college will seek to provide a reasonable and appropriate response and will correct any mistakes or misunderstandings and will take any other action as appropriate. Where a complaint is upheld against an individual or group this will be dealt with confidentially. Action will be through internal processes and procedures and specific details not reported to the complainant.

- 4.1.3 Although complaints will be dealt with in confidence this is with the provision that an individual against whom a complaint is made has the right to be supplied with a copy of the complaint made against them.
- 4.1.4 Complaints against members of staff of the college are always classified as formal complaints. The Deputy/Vice Principal for Quality & MIS and the Director of Human Resources must therefore be notified of the complaint. Complaints concerning the Principal will be investigated by the Chair of Governors. This excludes complaints related to appeal decisions. Complaints against the Quality Director will be investigated by one of the Deputy/Vice Principals.
- 4.1.5 The college will treat all complaints seriously and without discrimination. However, where an investigation concludes there are reasonable grounds to believe that the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice, appropriate action will be taken against the complainant. The college reserves the right not to investigate where ongoing complaints are made and grounds for complaint have previously not been found. Reasons will be given as to why the complaint is considered to be an abuse of process. Further information can be found in the college's Persistent or Vexatious Complaints Policy.
- 4.1.6 The time limits set out in these guidelines will normally be followed. However, where for good reason this is not possible, the complainant will be kept notified of progress.
- 4.1.7 The effectiveness of any complaints procedure depends on the college being able to collect appropriate information from parties involved in order to investigate the matter properly. For this reason, anonymous complaints will not be dealt with under these guidelines.
- 4.1.8 These guidelines comprise of a number of stages. Most complaints can be resolved informally by individuals pursuing matters directly with relevant staff. Only where these informal routes have been pursued and the complainant remains dissatisfied, should the formal complaint be invoked.
- 4.1.9 All complaints must be raised **within one calendar month** of the instance which led to the complaint.
- 4.1.10 Parents or carers may submit a complaint on behalf of a child (EPYP). For young people aged 19–25 with an EHCP, their consent will be obtained before a parent acts on their behalf.

For students aged 18 or over enrolled in adult courses or apprenticeships, written consent is required if they wish to authorise someone to act on their behalf.

4.2 Informal Complaints Procedure

- 4.2.1 Most complaints can be resolved informally and where practical, a complaint should be dealt with as close as possible to the point at which it arises. This relates to informal complaints, such as those received verbally

and/or those relating to what the complainant views as relatively minor incidents.

- 4.2.2 This also relates to complaints made by student representatives in student feedback or course team meetings. Although all these complaints are classified as “informal complaints” for the purposes of these guidelines, they are all taken seriously and should be investigated thoroughly by the appropriate member of staff.
- 4.2.3 Where an Informal Complaint is received and recorded by the Quality Department, an Investigating Officer will be appointed and the complainant will receive a response within 10 working days of the complaint being registered. Informal Complaints will be appointed to the appropriate Manager from the College Management Team to investigate.
- 4.2.4 If the complainant remains dissatisfied then a formal complaint should be raised, in writing within 5 days of the outcome/response.

4.3 Formal Complaints

- 4.3.1 All formal complaints should be made to the Quality Department. Where formal complaints are received by the Principal or other staff at the college these should be forwarded to the Quality Department for logging in the first instance.
- 4.3.2 Formal complaints can be received by letter, email, telephone, or in person by the complainant. Where complaints are received over the telephone or verbally, the Quality Department will ensure information is recorded detailing:
 - The nature of the complaint
 - The informal steps already taken with full details of the response received (where applicable)
 - A statement setting out why the complainant is dissatisfied

Please note: Complaints made by telephone may be recorded for monitoring purposes.

- 4.3.3 Under normal operating circumstances the complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of its receipt. Responses to complaints will be acknowledged using the following methods:
 - Letter – A letter or an email will be written to the complainant if they have communicated their complaint in the form of a letter
 - Email – An email will be written to the complainant if they have communicated their complaint in an email
 - Verbal – Verbal acknowledgements will be made where the complainant has complained via telephone or face to face

The complainant will be informed:

- Who has been/will be appointed as the investigating officer
- The maximum length of time the investigation can take
- Who to contact with any queries during the investigation

It will be the responsibility of the Quality Department to acknowledge written complaints. Complaints taken by telephone or face-to-face will be acknowledged at the time by the quality team member taking the details.

- 4.3.4 The Quality Department will co-ordinate and act as administrator for the duration of the complaint investigation.
- 4.3.5 Formal complaints, once acknowledged will be forwarded to the appointed Investigating Officer, who is trained on complaint handling and resolution, to conduct a full and thorough investigation. Formal Complaint investigations will be appointed to an appropriate Director from the Senior Leadership team.
- 4.3.6 Where appropriate the Investigating Officer may require a detailed discussion with the complainant to agree the terms of reference for the investigation, confirm key points of concern or to obtain further particulars of the complaint.
- 4.3.7 The Investigating Officer may wish to convene a hearing involving the complainant and any other persons involved in the matter so they can submit their respective cases. A representative from Human Resources will could also be invited where a complaint about a member of staff is being investigated.
- 4.3.8 All parties involved including students and staff can be accompanied by a person of their choice to offer support, assistance or advice and any meetings during the investigation. The person can be a friend, recognised trade union member or member of staff but should not constitute legal representation.
- 4.3.9 After completing the investigation, the Investigating Officer will make a decision. Where the complaint is upheld, the Quality Department has authority in conjunction with the Deputy Principal of Finance and Resources to refund proportionate fees (from Faculty budgets) or offer small gestures as an apology and to restore goodwill. The Deputy/Vice Principal for Quality & MIS will also ensure remedial action is taken to ensure similar complaints do not arise in the future.
- 4.3.10 The decision will be communicated in writing to the complainant and all other relevant parties, usually under normal operating circumstances, within 15 working days of the acknowledgement of the complaint. Where the investigation is likely to take longer all parties will be informed and kept up to date at regular intervals subject to a maximum total investigation period of 30 working days. Under extraordinary circumstances, complaint investigations may be paused or extended where the Investigating Officer has limited access to evidence and resources. All parties will be informed of any pause or extension and will be notified when investigations will resume.
- 4.3.11 The decision, whether upheld or rejected, along with the reasons for the decision, will be clearly stated in the response letter. The complaint response will be sent in writing, to the complainant by email, or by post (where the college has no email record for the complainant).

- 4.3.12 Complaints may be rejected if the Investigating Officer finds the complaints raised are unfounded and college policies and procedures had been followed and maintained. Complaints will also be rejected where the complainant hasn't raised their complaint with the timeline specified (see 4.1.9)
- 4.3.13 If a student is not satisfied with the decision of Warrington and Vale Royal College, they may exercise their right to complain to the Awarding Organisation (where applicable e.g. qualification related matters). Where applicable, if the student is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint to the Awarding Organisation, they may exercise their right to escalate the appeal to the Regulatory Body for qualifications, examinations and assessments. Either a representative of Warrington and Vale Royal College or the Awarding Organisation will be able to offer guidance on the appropriate qualification regulator.'
- 4.3.14 Higher Education complainants that remain dissatisfied with the investigation outcome will receive a Completion of Procedures letter, under OIA rules, within 28 days following receipt of the complaint response. Further details on escalating your complaint to the OIA can be found in section 4.4.7.
- 4.3.15 Higher Education complaints under OIA rules are defined as, any courses equivalent to Level 4 or higher of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This includes some professional courses at Level 4 and above.
- 4.3.16 **Freedom of Speech Complaints**
In accordance with the College's Freedom of Speech Policy and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, the College is committed to protecting lawful freedom of speech for all students, staff, and visitors. Where a formal complaint raises concerns that relate to the exercise or restriction of freedom of speech, the College will ensure that such matters are considered within this legal and policy framework. Complainants are encouraged to raise these concerns through the College's internal procedures in the first instance. Where appropriate, unresolved complaints may be referred to the Office for Students (OfS) under the Free Speech Complaints Scheme.

4.4 Complaint Review (Complaint Appeal)

- 4.4.1 The stages of the guidelines set out above have been established to allow a fair and thorough investigation of a complaint and to ensure that it is dealt with objectively. If the complainant, or any party involved in the investigation, believes that a complaint has not been dealt with properly or fairly, they may submit a letter of appeal to the Principal within 5 working days of receipt of the decision. The Principal's PA will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 5 working days of receipt.
- 4.4.2 The Principal will consider the circumstances of the case on the basis of the documentary evidence and such advice felt necessary, in order to determine whether there is prima facie evidence to support the complainant's appeal that the case was not handled properly or fairly.

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Where the Principal is unavailable to review the appeal (e.g. sickness or annual leave) a member of the Executive Leadership Team will be appointed.

- 4.4.3 In exceptional circumstances, where appropriate and should sufficient evidence exist for further investigation, one of the Assistant/Deputy/Vice Principals may lead a further enquiry.
- 4.4.4 The Principal's decision will be final on the basis of the evidence and advice available or in the case of a further investigation on the basis of the recommendations of the Deputy/Vice Principal.
- 4.4.5 The Principal's decision will be communicated in writing, normally within 10 working days of the date the appeal was received.
- 4.4.6 The Principal's decision will be clearly stated, along with the reasons for the decision. The appeal response letter will be sent to the complainant by email or by post (where applicable). All outgoing post and emails will be recorded internally. This concludes the college's complaints procedure.
- 4.4.7 Where the complaint is from a Higher Education complainant, a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued within 28 days after completion of the internal processes.
- 4.4.8 Higher Education complaints can be pursued with the Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) <http://www.oiahe.org.uk> who will identify if the complaint is eligible for their review. Escalation to the OIA must be made within 12 months from the date of the Completion of Procedures letter, although it is particularly important to do this promptly if the remedy being sought is time sensitive. Further information on complaining to the OIA can be found at this website address [How to complain to us - OIAHE](#)
- 4.4.9 Further Education and Apprenticeship complaints can be escalated to the ESFA within 12 months after the issue happened. You can email or post your complaint to complaints.ESFA@education.gov.uk or

Customer Service Team
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

4.5 Communication

- 4.5.1 Students will be made aware of this policy at Induction and it is made accessible through the college website, Student Grid and the WVR app.
- 4.5.2 All staff will be made aware of the contents of this policy via InfoPoint. Copies of this policy are accessible by all staff via the College Intranet (InfoPoint) and from the Quality Department. Training will be provided through the quality team to assist all staff in responding effectively to complaints.
- 4.5.3 There are a number of students within the college who do not have English as their first language. The ESOL course (English for Speakers of Other

Languages) is popular and attracts students from other cultures who speak a diverse range of languages. If staff or students have difficulty understanding the complaints policy or making a complaint due to the lack of spoken or written English, they will be offered support through an interpreter if required.

4.5.4 Staff/students who have difficulty communicating or understanding the complaints policy due to disability will be offered support for example:

1. People who have a Hearing Impairment
 - a. Hearing loop
 - b. Sign language
2. People with a Visual Impairment
 - a. A reader can be provided
 - b. Assistive Technology can be utilised
3. People with Learning Disability
 - a. An easy read version of the complaints procedure can be made available
 - b. An Advocate can assist the person with learning disabilities to make the complaint

4.6 Compliments

4.6.1 Compliments are valuable, welcome and important and when they are received, either verbally or in writing, they will be recorded by the Quality Department.

4.6.2 Compliments enable the college to:

- understand that the service we provide meets learner and employer satisfaction
- provide positive feedback to our staff
- influence our organisational and service development
- inform our quality assurance and improvement cycle

4.6.3 All compliments made in writing can be sent to quality@wvr.ac.uk or you can send in a letter to the Quality Director, Warrington and Vale Royal College, Winwick Road, Warrington, Cheshire, WA2 8QA.

5. Monitoring

Ongoing monitoring of complaints received by the College is carried out by the Deputy/Vice Principal for Quality & MIS in association with the Quality Directorate.

As part of the Performance Management Cycle regular reports are submitted to Senior Management meetings and to Governors through the Standards and Curriculum Committee.

A summary of complaints received within the academic year is used to inform self-assessment and strategic planning.



Appendix A

COMPLAINTS FORM

The purpose of this form is for individuals to register a complaint. Complaints can also be made in writing by letter or email to the Quality Department

quality@wvr.ac.uk

Complainant Details

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Tel: Home _____ Mobile _____

Email address: _____

Details of Complaint (A brief summary of the complaint including times & dates)**Informal action already taken and details of the response**

Signature _____ Date _____

Date received by Quality:

Equality Impact Assessment

Policy Title:	Customer Complaints and Compliments
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Identify the Key Stakeholders:	Students Parents Employers Staff	
What is the impact on the following:	Key Characteristics	Impact
	Age	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely
	Disability	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely
	Sex	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely
	Racial group	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely
	Religion and belief	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely
	Sexual orientation	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely
	Gender re-assignment	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely
	Pregnancy and maternity	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely
	Marriage and civil partnership	(1) A positive impact is intended and very likely

	Please tick			
Have any additional safeguarding risks been identified?	Yes	☐	No	☒
Any major changes or adjustments required:	Yes	☐	No	☒
Stop and remove:	Yes	☐	No	☒

**Actions to be addressed:**

Action	To be completed by	Target Date	Completed (Y/N)

Validated by the Equality & Diversity Committee**Date:****If applicable, actions completed and validated by the
Equality & Diversity Committee****Date:**