Customer Complaints Policy and Procedure

2026/27
Academic Year

SLT Owner	**Emma Brannen**
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Customer Complaints Policy 2026 – 2027

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Purpose and scope

Sandwell College, Central Saint Michael's Sixth Form and Cadbury College Sixth Form welcomes and encourages feedback from students, the parents/carers of students, organisations or contractors providing services on behalf of the college and members of the public to enable continuous improvement of our services. Where complaints occur the College makes every effort to resolve them quickly at the most appropriate level.

Complaints which are deemed to fall into any of the categories listed below will not be considered under the scope of this policy and procedure:

- Anonymous complaints where there is insufficient information to allow the matter to be investigated.
- Complaints that have already been fully investigated and concluded under this or another College procedure.
- Matters that fall outside the remit of this procedure (for example, those covered by other formal policies such as safeguarding, disciplinary, or whistleblowing procedures).
- Complaints submitted without sufficient information or grounds to enable a reasonable investigation.
- Complaints submitted outside the published time limits set out in this procedure, unless exceptional circumstances apply.
- Complaints that have already been considered and determined through court or tribunal proceedings, or resolved through a settlement agreement with the College.
- Complaints that are considered to be malicious, vexatious, or frivolous: This may include (but not limited to) situations where:

  Malicious complaints
  - The complainant knowingly makes false allegations or provides information that they know to be untrue.
  - The complaint is made with the intent to harm, discredit, or disadvantage an individual or the College.

  Vexatious complaints
  - The complainant persistently raises the same issue despite it having already been fully investigated and concluded.
  - The complaint is pursued in a manner that is unreasonable, disproportionate, or intended to cause disruption or distress.
  - Multiple complaints are submitted about the same matter without presenting any new evidence.

  Frivolous complaints
  - The complaint lacks seriousness or substance and does not raise a genuine concern.
  - The matter complained about is trivial or clearly does not warrant investigation under the College's formal complaints process.

Nb. If a student is found to have made a malicious complaint, this could lead to disciplinary action being taken.

Confidentiality

As far as possible, confidentiality will be observed. Where a complaint relates to specific individuals, the college may seek permission to share such details with them. If permission is not given, it may not be possible for the college to fully investigate or resolve the complaint. It is expected that students will assume responsibility for all communication in relation to problems or complaints; however, parents, carers or other relevant parties may on occasion contact the college directly if they have serious concerns. Where a learner is aged 18 or over the college will only release information to a parent/carer or relevant third party with the express written consent of the student. On receipt of written consent, the college will communicate directly with the parent/carer/relevant third party acting on behalf of the learner.

College Responsibility

It is the responsibility of all staff to take complaints seriously and to resolve problems swiftly in a supportive, courteous and timely manner in order to prevent them escalating and becoming the cause of further dissatisfaction. Complaints that cannot be informally resolved by an individual member of staff must be reported to their line manager for investigation and response.

Complaints will usually be investigated by the manager responsible for the provision, service, procedure or facility about which the complaint is made.
Where a problem or difficulty cannot be informally resolved by staff in the departments the complaint should be logged with the Colleges Quality & Standards Manager.
The Quality Department maintains records of complaints which are regularly viewed. Records are examined for timeliness, quality of handling and resolution along with patterns and trends. This analysis is used to inform the quality improvement plans and ultimately improve the quality of service to its customers.

The Quality & Standards Manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the policy is adhered to.
- Logging formal complaints and monitoring response times.
- Checking written responses provided by the Investigating Officer.
- Checking written responses cover all aspects of the complaint prior to sending the response.
- Recording, analysing and reporting on the outcomes of complaints.
- Producing an annual report for the Learners Quality & Curriculum Committee.
- Checking that actions have been put in place to prevent reoccurrence of complaints.
- Ensuring that central records relating to formal complaints are securely stored for a minimum period of six years.

The Investigating Officer is responsible for:

- Carrying out a balanced investigation into the complaint.
- Complying with the timescale for completion.
- Providing a written response to the Quality & Standards Manager.
- Ensure actions have been put in place to prevent the reoccurrence of complaints.
- Forwarding all related documentation to the Quality Department for secure storage.

Complainant Responsibility
To facilitate an initial complaint the complainant must first approach their teacher/tutor to discuss their concerns fully and will approach the Department Manager where a resolution cannot be found with their teacher or tutor. Following discussion with the Department Manager, where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome they will approach the Assistant Principal for the relevant Curriculum Area.

Where a resolution cannot be agreed with the Manager and Assistant Principal (Stage 1 and Stage 2) and the complaint is taken formal, the complainant will need to explain in writing the concern as clearly and as fully as possible (such as including names, times, dates) include all points they wish to be reviewed and include all action taken to date and the outcomes of stage 1 and stage 2 informal discussions. If the complainant is a student, then they need to provide their full name and student ID number with any information about the complaint. See complaints form.

Complainants must recognise that in some cases circumstances may be beyond the control of the College which will impact on the final outcome of any complaint.

Complaints will be made as timely as possible following a concern and where related to a programme of study, will be within 12 months of the completion date of the course or the last date of attendance on a course (where a student may not have fully completed their planned programme of study), as recorded on the College student record system. Due to the nature and validation of awarding organisation qualifications, the College will be unable to investigate complaints that refer to concerns/issues of more than 12 months old.

Following any investigation and conclusion of a formal complaint if the complainant is not satisfied, then they can appeal. Appeals need to be made in writing within 10 working days of receiving the decision, sent to the Quality and Standards Manager, which will then be referred to the Vice Principal to review.

Informal Complaints

It is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved on an informal basis and close to their point of origin.

The complainant must first approach their teacher/tutor to discuss their concerns fully and will approach the Department Manager where a resolution cannot be found with their teacher or tutor (Stage 1). Following discussion with the Department Manager, where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome they will approach the Assistant Principal for the relevant Curriculum Area (Stage 2).

It is anticipated that all informal stage 1 and 2 complaints will be reviewed by the relevant manager and resolved within 5-10 working days.

Note; where the concern relates to the marking or results of an assessment or examination, the Academic Assessment Appeals Policy will be used. A copy of this policy can be found on the College website.

Formal Complaints Process

Whenever possible any concerns will be dealt with as soon as a member of College staff is made aware of them. A written formal complaint sent to the Quality Department (Harminder.Shergill@sandwell.ac.uk) will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt by Quality.

The Quality & Standards Manager will maintain a full record of formal written complaints received and their outcome.

Following a full investigation, a response will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days. Where more time is needed e.g. the complaint is complex or the College term breaks

prevent the completion of the investigation, the complainant will be sent an interim letter outlining progress with the investigation and will also include a date for the full response.

Appeals
Responses to formal written complaints will include details on appeals.

A complainant has 10 working days from the date of the outcome letter to deliver a written notice of appeal to the Quality & Standards Manager Harminder.Shergill@sandwell.ac.uk if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal complaint investigation.

An appeal must be made in writing and include the reason for the appeal along with any additional supporting evidence. An appeal can only be considered on the basis that at least one of the following criteria apply:

- There has been a procedural irregularity.
- New evidence has come to light.
- Not all of the evidence was considered when coming to a conclusion.

The Colleges Vice Principal will review the complaint with any new evidence and come to a conclusion. The Vice Principal will normally respond in writing to the complainant within 10 working days.

Taking a complaint beyond the College – Further Education Students

When the formal complaints policy has been exhausted, and if a resolution has not been achieved, the complainant has the right to complain to the Colleges regulatory body, which for the purpose of this policy is the Department for Education

Note; the Department for Education will normally only take up a complaint when they are satisfied that the College policy, including appeal, has been exhausted, unless the Agency believe that the complaint is not being dealt with appropriately, when they may intervene during the formal complaints process.

Details for The Department for Education are available from the website:
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure

Taking a complaint beyond the College – Higher Education Students
If the colleges formal complaints policy has been exhausted, and if a resolution has not been achieved, the complainant has the right to complain to the validating Higher Education Institution (HEI). Contact details and information about how to make complaints are available on the web-site of the relevant HEI. The complainant may also take their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education students. Details for the Office of the Independent Adjudicator are available from the website:
https://www.oiahe.org.uk/

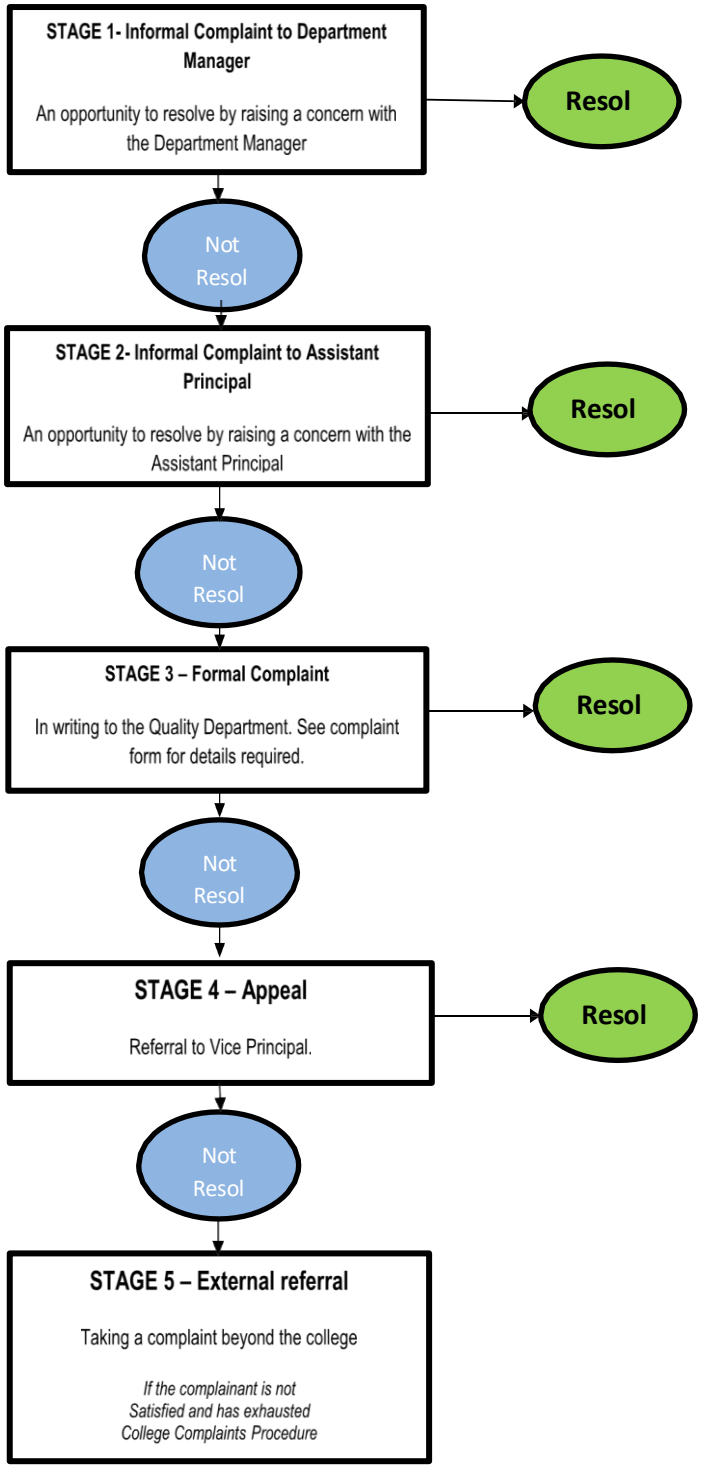
If the complaint relates to a member of College staff, it will be initially investigated by a Manager and if unresolved should be referred to Human Resources.

Key Contacts

Harminder.Shergill@sandwell.ac.uk – Quality & Standards Manager
Mandy.Wallader@sandwell.ac.uk – Quality Coordinator

COMPLAINTS PROCESS FLOW CHART

2023-2025



COMPLAINT FORM

When issues cannot be resolved by the Tutors, Heads of Section/Curriculum or Assistant Principal, learners may complete a formal Complaint Form and forward it to the Quality Department. **(Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the complaints process must be fully exhausted before completing this form)**

If you have an **unresolved** complaint, please fill in this form **IN BLOCK CAPITALS** and hand it in an envelope, to the College Receptionist, who will send it to the Quality Department, 1 Spon Lane, West Bromwich, West Midlands, B70 6AW. Alternatively, you may wish to write a letter to the Quality & Standards Manager or email a formal written complaint providing the evidence below to;

Quality and Standards Manager; Harminder.Shergill@sandwell.ac.uk
Quality Coordinator; Mandy.Wallader@sandwell.ac.uk

The information you provide may be passed to other members of senior staff for action.

Name			
Address			
Person Code		**Telephone Number**	

(Please be as specific as possible and complete all the sections below. The more information that you are able to provide will assist the investigation / action process).

Stage 1 and 2 of the complaints processes must be fully exhausted before moving to Stage 3 Formal Complaint. **Please provide a summary of the action taken and outcome of Stage 1 and 2 and as well as the details of your ongoing complaint and all points you wish to be reviewed.**
1. Please tell us what action you have taken prior to completing this complaint form and any outcomes
2. The name of any member of staff or manager you made your complaint to

3. How did they try to help in resolving your complaint?

4. Points to be reviewed and details of the complaint

Please attach any relevant information you feel may help the College resolve your complaint.

Signed		**Date**	