

Complaints Procedure

August 2009

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Complaints Procedure

1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to identify the procedure to be followed where college users wish to make a formal complaint. It is intended that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and wherever possible, resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This procedure applies to complaints made by students of Perth College UHI, the general public and external agencies and should be followed if attempts to resolve issues or concerns informally have been unsuccessful.
- 2.2 This procedure is not intended for complaints about assessment or progression decisions. These issues are dealt with through the academic appeals procedure.
- 2.3 This procedure is also not intended for the more generalised comments/suggestions which are invited from all users of the College. Details of this procedure can be found in the leaflet "Your Voice" which is available from the Reception Area of each building, Curriculum Offices, Student Services, the LRC, Learning Centres, and the Quality Unit.
- 2.4 In addition, the procedure does not apply to complaints by members of staff which relate to his or her employment. These will be dealt with in accordance with the appropriate HR procedure.
- 2.5 If a complaint is made on behalf of an individual by a third party such as a friend, parent or guardian, Perth College UHI will seek the written consent of the individual in question before entering into any further correspondence with the third party making the complaint.

3 Definitions

Complaint: A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction by a customer whether justified or not.

College Users: This refers to all students or visitors to any Perth College UHI premises.

4 Responsibilities

- 4.1 **The College:** The College will acknowledge all formal complaints and endeavour to deal with them as quickly, objectively and fairly as possible. We will provide advice and guidance on following this procedure (available from Student Services staff, the Students' Association, Student Advisers or the Quality Administrator) and we will review all complaints on a regular basis in order to improve our services.

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- 4.2 **The Complainant:** The complainant should seek to resolve the matter at an informal level if possible but if this is unsatisfactory, he or she should explain the problem as clearly and fully as possible and allow the college reasonable time to deal with the matter.

5 Procedure

5.1 Making a Formal Complaint

- 5.1.1 If a problem remains unresolved or is considered too serious to be dealt with informally, a written complaint should be addressed to the Quality Unit, Perth College UHI, Crieff Road, Perth PH1 2NX.
- 5.1.2 The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 3 working days and an investigation will be carried out by the Quality Unit or by other appropriate members of staff. The investigation will be conducted in a confidential, objective and thorough manner and may involve further contact with the complainant for clarification or further detail.
- 5.1.3 The investigation will be completed as swiftly as possible and a final response sent to the complainant - normally within 3 weeks. In the case of an unavoidable delay in resolution, the complainant will be kept informed of progress on a regular basis until the matter is resolved.
- 5.1.4 Formal written complaints made to other members of College management will normally be acknowledged and forwarded to the Quality Unit for investigation as noted above.
- 5.1.5 The Quality Unit maintains a log of all complaints for annual review by the College Management Team. The purpose of the review is to identify areas for improvement in our service.

5.2 Appeals Against the Outcome of a Complaint

- 5.2.1 A complainant who is dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal complaint may appeal in writing to the Principal, within 15 working days from receipt of the response.
- 5.2.2 The Principal, or his or her nominee, will review the details of the complaint, the nature of the investigation and the outcome and will respond in writing stating whether or not the appeal has been upheld, normally within 10 working days.
- 5.2.3 The decision of the Principal is final and this exhausts the College internal complaint procedure.

5.3 Appeals Outwith the College

- 5.3.1 In all cases, bodies outwith the college will expect a complainant to have exhausted local procedures before an appeal is made to them.
- 5.3.2 If the complaint is related to Higher Education and the complainant wishes to make a further appeal, written details should be sent to: UHI Secretary, UHI Millennium Institute, Ness Walk, Inverness IV3 5SQ.
- 5.3.3 If the complaint is related to Further Education and the complainant wishes to make a further appeal, he or she should contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, at: SPSO, FREEPOST EH641, Edinburgh, EH3 0BR (www.spsso.org.uk). The website contains full details of what can and cannot be considered and how to make a complaint.
- 5.3.4 If the complaint is related to provision in the Language School and the complainant wishes to make a further appeal, written details should be sent to: The British Council, Accreditation Unit Co-ordinator, Bridgewater House, 58 Whitworth Street, Manchester M1 6BB.

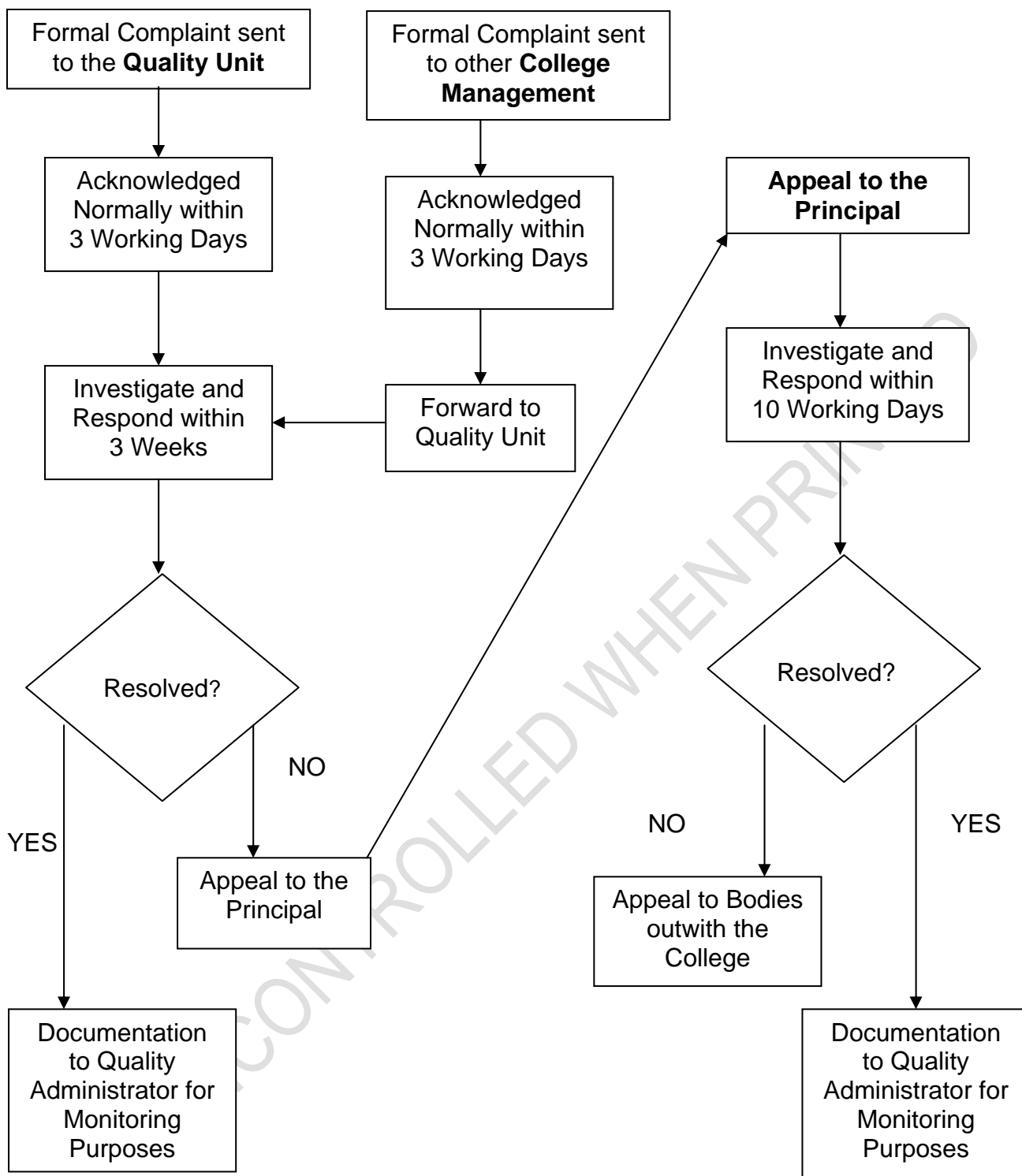
6 Linked Policies/Related Documents

The Quality Manual.

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Handling Complaints Flow-Chart

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Data Protection

The College has a Data Protection Policy. It outlines the College's approach to compliance with the 8 principles of Data Protection. The following states clearly the nature of records held in respect of Complaints and Comments and Suggestions.

Electronic Records

The Quality Administrator maintains a database for Complaints and a separate database for Comments and Suggestions. In the case of Complaints the records date from session 1998/1999 (January 1999) when a revised Procedure for dealing with Complaints was introduced. The database contains a summary and essential information only. In the case of Comments and Suggestions records date from the inception of the current process in January 2000.

This data is treated as confidential and is retained primarily for analytical purposes.

Complaints

A paper record of complaints for the current and preceding academic session is retained. The detailed nature of some complaints, along with reports and evidence provided makes it impractical to store this information electronically.

Comments and Suggestions

The record for Comments and Suggestions is primarily electronic.

Appendix 3

Handling Comments and Suggestions

1 Purpose

This document replaces elements of the 'Operational Handbook: Handling Complaints (including Comments and Suggestions)', which was superseded when the foregoing Complaints Procedure was initially revised in 2007.

It explains how Comments and Suggestions are handled and the agreement that is in place for Quality Unit involvement in 'PC Enquiries'.

2 Scope

Comments and Suggestions offers an 'open forum' and is in addition to all formal channels, for staff, students and visitors to make comments or suggestions about College facilities and services both positive and negative.

Pre-printed forms are available throughout the College. Posting boxes and feedback boards are located in the main reception/foyer areas of the Brahan, Webster, and Goodlyburn buildings. Additional posting boxes are located at each of the Learning Centres.

3 Definitions

No ambiguous terms.

4 Responsibilities

Responsibility for Comments and Suggestions rests in the Quality Unit with the Quality Manager; monitored and disseminated by the Quality Administrator who also co-ordinates feedback and maintains records.

5 Procedure

- Comments/suggestions noted on pre-printed forms and 'posted' at points in the College.
- Boxes will be emptied by the Quality Administrator on a regular basis or by Colleagues in other buildings by arrangement, normally weekly.
- Learning Centres and Pathways will forward any completed forms to the Quality Administrator for information and where a matter cannot be addressed locally.
- Forms can be taken away from Learning Centres or the College and returned independently. These should be sent to the Quality Administrator.
- Forms will be logged on a secure database, maintained for monitoring purposes.
- Forms will usually be forwarded to the appropriate College Manager for comment/feedback, information, and action where appropriate.
- College Managers will be asked to respond to the comment/suggestion, within 7 working days of the forwarding date.

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- The Quality Administrator will assess the comments/suggestions. If s/he is in a position to make a suitable response without reference to a particular manager s/he will do so.
- Responses made on behalf of others will always be verified before being made public.
- Quality Administrator will prepare Feedback Memos for posting on Feedback Boards or letters to individuals, as appropriate.

PC Enquiries

These are online enquiries, occasionally 'complaints', which are monitored and distributed by the Marketing Unit. In all but the most exceptional circumstances enquiries should be dealt with by the area of the College the enquiry is directed to.

Enquiries should be copied to the Quality Administrator **only where the enquiry appears in particular to be a 'complaint'**, eg apparent poor service for a Distance Learning student, lack of feedback for an on-line course, etc. **This does not imply that the Quality Unit will act on this. But does imply that it may, where appropriate, undertake follow-up.**

In the unlikely event that Marketing come across something which they feel may be an exceptional circumstance they will forward it to the Quality Administrator before forwarding it elsewhere.

Where this is not practical due to absence of Quality Administrator it should be forwarded directly to the Quality Manager: for a 'ruling' in his/her absence the Assistant Principal Curriculum and Planning.

Where none are available forward to the appropriate area and bring to the attention of one of the above at the earliest opportunity.

What constitutes an exceptional circumstance (examples):

Complaint about a specified member of staff.

Indication that this is a matter which has repeatedly **not** been dealt with by one area of the College.

6 Linked Policies/Related Documents

The Quality Manual.