



## COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY

<b>Process Area</b>	<b>Business Systems</b>
<b>Reference Number</b>	<b>BUS/010</b>
<b>Directorate</b>	<b>Finance &amp; Planning</b>

Issue No	Date	Details	Author	Approved
001	Sept 2007	First Issue	MC / GD / JH	WMCK
002	Oct 2009	Changes to procedure	GD/JH	BD
003	Jan 2013	Reviewed	BD	GB
004	Aug 2016	Fourth Issue – full revision in line with the Sector agreed policy	LMCK	BD
005	Nov 2017	Fifth issue – revision in line with Sector agreed policy	RS	GB
006	May 2019	Sixth issue – updated to reflect requirements of Data Protection legislation	ST / TMG	Governing Body
007	May 2022	Seventh issue – Updated to reflect additional policy exemption, definitions, roles, responsibilities and reference to amended Data Protection legislation	ST / LC	Governing Body
008	Oct 2023	Eighth issue – updated to reflect revised Roles and Responsibilities	ST/LC	

**If requested, the College will make the policy available in alternative formats to accommodate visual impairments. The policy can also be downloaded from the College website and made available in alternative languages upon request.**

## 1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

Southern Regional College is committed to providing the highest quality of service to all our customers. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of service provided by the College or College staff, they have the right to complain.

A complaint may be defined as '*A statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.*' [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)

The raising of complaints and the provision of feedback provides the College with an opportunity to improve its services. The College monitors complaints and their outcomes in order to improve the quality of our provision. This policy advises customers of the College's commitment to ensuring that any issues or problems are resolved quickly and as close to the source as possible, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Information gathered in the management of complaint and compliments will be processed within the provisions of current Data Protection legislation. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a public task or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller, e.g. Public Authorities are accountable to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

The customer's information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating the complaint (this may include the member of staff who is the subject of the complaint or compliment). The customer's information may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. Further information on data protection and the individual's rights are available on our website ([Data Protection \(src.ac.uk\)](http://Data Protection (src.ac.uk))).

## 2.0 SCOPE

- 2.1 For the purposes of this policy, a customer may be a student, staff member, member of the public or third party stakeholder.
- 2.2 The College will comply with the Standards for Complaint Handling in the Public Service agreed by the Permanent Secretaries Group, ensuring that:
  - a) There are clear lines of accountability for the handling and consideration of complaints within the College.
  - b) Complainants have open and easy access to the College's complaints policy and information required to enable them to complain about any aspect of service.
  - c) Complaints are dealt with through an efficient and effective process.
  - d) All investigations are conducted promptly, thoroughly, openly, honestly and objectively.
  - e) Complaints are responded to as promptly as possible and all issues raised are addressed.
  - f) The College promotes a culture of learning from complaints so that, where necessary, service, processes and practices can be improved.
  - g) The organisation monitors the effectiveness of its complaint handling and responsiveness.

2.3 In addition, the College will:

- a) Ensure that all positive comments are passed on to the relevant staff members.
- b) Process all complaints in a fair, consistent and unbiased manner.
- c) Endeavour to communicate with the customer within agreed timeframes throughout the process.
- d) Ensure no customer is disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint.
- e) Promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).
- f) Respect confidentiality and process customers' data in line with current data protection legislation, including the United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA).
- g) Monitor and review complaints and compliments for quality assurance and equality monitoring purposes.

2.4 Exemptions to this policy include:

- a) Anonymous complaints, which will not usually be investigated, but will be recorded.
- b) Matters where another policy or procedure applies e.g. academic appeals<sup>1</sup> or grievance procedure.
- c) Matters relating to recruitment exercises.
- d) The right of the College not to investigate unreasonable or vexatious complaints.

### 3.0 DEFINITIONS

<b>Formal Complaint</b>	An issue which has been notified to the College, where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been potential unlawful behaviour;</li> <li>• There has been a potential violation of College policy;</li> <li>• There may be potential disciplinary action;</li> <li>• The informal complaints process has been exhausted and no satisfactory resolution can be found;</li> <li>• The complainant expressly states their desire for the complaint to be addressed via the formal complaints process.</li> </ul>
<b>Informal Complaint</b>	An issue which does not meet the threshold of a Formal Complaint, and which can be reasonably resolved in a quick and amicable manner through discussion or correspondence, without the necessity for a detailed formal investigation.
<b>Comment</b>	Feedback, of a less serious nature, where dissatisfaction may have been expressed about the College, but the complainant has not requested investigation or remedial action.
<b>Compliment</b>	Positive feedback on the performance of the College or its staff.
<b>Appeal</b>	A request by the complainant for an internal review of the outcome of the investigation process.

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to student handbooks for information on academic appeals.

## 4.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### 4.1 Chief Executive

The Chief Executive as Accounting Officer is responsible for establishing and maintaining a sound complaint management system that supports the achievement of College policies, aims and objectives, and is underpinned by the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

Although the Chief Executive bears overall responsibility and is liable to be called to account for specific failures, the Executive Team, Senior Management Team, all line managers and staff have a responsibility for acting to ensure that the College adopts a robust and proactive approach to complaint management.

### 4.2 Director of Finance and Planning

The Director of Finance and Planning, as the Senior Responsible Officer, has overall responsibility for complaint management. Their responsibilities include:

- Ensuring a robust and effective Complaints and Compliments policy is in place.
- Ensuring appropriate mechanisms for complaint management are in place.
- Ensuring a Responsible Owner is appointed to investigate the complaint.
- Ensuring the Accounting Officer is appraised of complaints received by the College.
- Liaising with the Finance and General Purposes Committee.
- Making sure that all staff are aware of the College's Complaints and Compliments Policy and know what their responsibilities are in relation to complaints received by the College.

### 4.3 Executive Team, Senior Management Team and Line Managers

It is the responsibility of the Executive Team the Senior Management Team and line managers to support the Chief Executive by ensuring that complaints received within their respective business areas are promptly addressed in a thorough and transparent manner.

Where complaints are raised, Directors, Senior Managers and Line Managers must:

- Immediately notify the Corporate Compliance Manager who will initiate the investigation process.
- Co-operate with the Investigating Officer to ensure that a vigorous and prompt investigation is undertaken.
- Agree and implement any necessary recommended changes to systems and procedures to ensure that similar complaints will not happen again.
- Ensure that systems and processes in operation within their area of responsibility are effective and designed with customer focus as a priority.

### 4.4 Corporate Compliance Manager

The Corporate Compliance Manager shall:

- Ensure all complaints and compliments received by the College are recorded on the College's internal registers.
- Ensure all complaints received by the College are managed in compliance with The College's Complaints and Compliments Policy.

- Ensure a Responsible Owner is appointed to investigate the complaint.
- Ensure a timely response is provided to the complainant.
- Ensure information relating to avenues of escalation are clearly communicated to the complainant.
- Oversee the implementation of any recommendations for improvement, which result from the completion of an investigation.
- Ensure appropriate training is provided to Responsible Owners.
- Provide all necessary reports to line management.
- Notify the Director of Finance and Planning of any changes to the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

#### **4.5 Responsible Owner**

The Responsible Owner is the individual appointed by the Corporate Compliance Manager to investigate the complaint. The Responsible owner will be of an appropriate level of seniority, with relevant technical knowledge/experience of the business area which is the subject of the complaint. The individual will have no prior connection to the complaint. The Responsible owner will provide their investigation report to the Corporate Compliance Manager within the required timescales.

#### **4.6 Appeal Panel**

The Appeal Panel is the individual(s) appointed by the Corporate Compliance Manager to consider the appeal request submitted by the complainant. The individual(s) will be of an appropriate level of seniority, with relevant technical knowledge/experience of the business area which is the subject of the appeal. The individual(s) will have no prior connection to the complaint.

#### **4.7 Staff Responsibilities**

All members of staff have a duty to ensure that all complaints received by the College are immediately identified<sup>\*2</sup> and notified to their Line Manager, who will refer the matter to the Corporate Compliance Manager.

Staff should endeavour to deescalate or attempt to informally manage any issues arising, prior to the submission of a complaint.

#### **4.8 Audit Committee and Governing Body Chairs**

In the event that the complaint is made about the Chief Executive, the Chair of the Audit Committee will appoint a suitable person to investigate and report. Any subsequent appeal will then be addressed by the Chair of the Governing Body or his/her delegated authority.

## **5.0 PROCEDURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

### **5.1 Compliments and Comments**

- 5.1.1 If a customer feels that the College has exceeded the expected standard of service or wishes to leave a compliment or positive comment, they can either:

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<sup>2</sup> If you are unsure if an issue reaches the threshold of a complaint, please engage with the Corporate Compliance Manager in the first instance.

- a) Complete an online 'Customer Compliments Form' at <https://portals.src.ac.uk/feedback/compliments.php>).
- b) Complete a hard copy 'Customer Compliments Form' (Appendix 2). Forms may be downloaded from the College website or they are available at reception.
- c) Email the College on [feedback@src.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@src.ac.uk).
- d) Advise a member of staff in person of the positive experience.

5.1.2 If a customer wishes to provide general feedback on the performance of the College they can:

- a) Complete an online Customer Comments Form at <https://portals.src.ac.uk/feedback/comments.php>.
- b) Email the College on [feedback@src.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@src.ac.uk).
- c) Advise a member of staff in person of their experience.

## 5.2 Informal Complaint

- 5.2.1 If there is an occasion where a customer is not satisfied with the service we provide; they have a right to complain.
- 5.2.2 We would encourage customers to seek to resolve any issues informally with the relevant member of staff e.g. face-to-face discussion.
- 5.2.3 Customers can email the College on [feedback@src.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@src.ac.uk) to provide details of their informal complaint.
- 5.2.4 Where a resolution cannot be found or if the complaint is sufficiently serious, the customer may submit a formal complaint in writing.

## 5.3 Formal Complaint

- 5.3.1 If a customer wishes to make a formal complaint, they can either:
  - a) Complete an online Customer Complaints Form on the College website at <https://portals.src.ac.uk/feedback/complaints.php>.
  - b) Complete a hard copy 'Customer Complaints Form' (Appendix 1). Forms are downloadable from the College website or available at reception.
  - c) Email the College on [feedback@src.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@src.ac.uk).
  - d) If the complaint relates to an academic matter, students have the right to contact and engage with the relevant Awarding Body directly.
- 5.3.2 If a customer wishes to complain verbally, they will be asked to confirm details of their complaint in writing.
- 5.3.3 If assistance is required with the completion of or the submission of a complaint, customers should contact the College's Corporate Compliance Manager for advice and guidance on how to do this.
- 5.3.4 Complaints should be submitted to the College no later than three months from the date of the issue arising. In exceptional circumstances, the College may exercise discretion with this timescale.

- 5.3.5 Complaints may be submitted on behalf of someone else, for example a person under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult. In line with the requirements of current data protection legislation, consent of the individual (the data subject) may be required.
- 5.3.6 All formal complaints will be forwarded to the relevant Responsible Owner for an open and objective investigation. Upon completion of the investigation, a written response will be issued to the complainant. For the purposes of this policy, the Responsible Owner<sup>3</sup> is defined as the individual appointed to investigate the complaint.
- 5.3.7 The College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed below in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Communication	Response Time
Complaint acknowledgement letter/email to customer.	5 working days* from receipt of complaint.
Letter/email issued to complainant if further information required to progress complaint.	Clarification information to be returned by the complainant within 10 working days of receipt of correspondence.
Complaint response letter/email to customer.	20 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email issued.

*\*Working days are those days on which the College is open. Weekends, statutory days, Bank Holidays and other College closures are classed as 'non-working' days.*

- 5.3.8 If, for reasons beyond the College's control the investigation and outcome exceeds, or is likely to exceed the timeframes set out in Table 1, the customer will be notified in writing as soon as is practicably possible.

## 5.4 Appeals

- 5.4.1 If a customer is dissatisfied with the College response to their complaint, they have the right to appeal. Appeals should be submitted in writing, with full details of the grounds for appeal, to the College's Corporate Compliance Manager within 10 working days from receipt of the complaint response. The basis for any appeal should be that the complaint was not managed in line with the College's Complaints and Compliments Policy.
- 5.4.2 Following receipt of an appeal the College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed below (Table 2).

**Table 2**

Communication	Response Time
Complainant submits appeal to the College.	10 working days from date customer receives complaint response.
Appeal acknowledgement letter/email to customer.	5 working days from receipt of appeal from customer.
Appeal response letter/email to customer.	20 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email issued.

<sup>3</sup> In the event that the complaint is made about the Chief Executive, the Chair of the Audit Committee will appoint a suitable person to investigate and report. Any subsequent appeal will then be addressed by the Chair of the Governing Body or his/her delegated authority.

- 5.4.3 Appeals will be considered by an individual(s) with no previous connection to the original complaint. The individual(s) appointed to consider the appeal request will depend on the nature of the complaint and appeal lodged.
- 5.4.4 The individual(s) appointed by the College to consider the appeal will only review the information contained within the scope of the original complaint and investigation, and will not consider any additional or new information which may be introduced by the appellant at this stage of the process
- 5.4.5 If, for reasons beyond the College's control, the investigation and outcome exceeds the timeframe or is likely to exceed the timeframe, the customer will be notified in writing.

## **5.5 Customer Communications**

### **5.5.1 Telephone communications**

The recording of telephone conversations for the purposes of distribution to and use by any third party, without consent is a breach of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy, the College does not consent to telephone calls being recorded, unless express consent has been obtained.

### **5.5.2 Face to face communications**

Complaint meetings are confidential. If a meeting is required to resolve the issue, minutes will be taken and made available upon request to those in attendance. If the complainant identifies any inaccuracies, the minute will be reviewed, and where an amendment is agreed, a revised minute will be issued. As minutes are kept, recordings of the meeting or conversations in relation to the complaint are not required. College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy, the College does not consent to recording of complaints meetings, unless express consent has been obtained.

## **5.6 If A Customer Remains Dissatisfied**

- 5.6.1 It is hoped that we will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints process. If the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the right to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Office (in his/her role as Commissioner for Complaints).

The customer can complain to the Ombudsman however the Ombudsman will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Customer Complaints Policy and where it has been received within six months of completing the College's complaints process. Contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
BT1 6HN  
[www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)



- 5.6.2 Higher Education (HE) students may also have the right, in certain circumstances, to raise a complaint with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). Contact details for the CMA are:

Competition and Markets Authority  
Victoria House  
Southampton Row  
London  
WC1B 4AD

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority>

- 5.6.3 It is the responsibility of the student to pursue any further appeal with the relevant awarding body having exhausted the College's internal processes in the first instance. Awarding bodies and universities have varying procedures in place for dealing with appeals, students will be told when they have completed the College's internal processes and what, if any, next steps are available to them.

## **5.7 Monitoring Complaints and Compliments**

- 5.7.1 The College welcomes and values all feedback from customers. The College analyses feedback and areas of complaint in order to improve services. All complaints will be dealt with sensitively and in all cases, the documentary evidence gathered and stored remains confidential to those involved. Statistical information will be made available for quality and equality monitoring purposes.

## **6.0 DISTRIBUTION**

- Policy Centre, SharePoint
- College Website
- This Policy will be made available, on request, in alternative formats including large print, braille, audio and in minority languages to meet the requirements of those who are not fluent in English.

## **7.0 REVIEW**

This Policy will be reviewed (and amended if necessary) in line with the College Policy Review schedule or sooner if required to reflect changes in legislation or circumstances.

## APPENDIX 1

**CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS FORM**

If you require assistance with making a complaint, please contact the College's Corporate Compliance Manager. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, consistent with a full investigation of the issue.

*If you are submitting a complaint on behalf of someone else, please provide their name/contact details in section 1B. We will need to contact the individual (the data subject) for permission to discuss the issue with you.*

**SECTION 1A – Complainant Details**

<b>Title:</b>	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms	Other:			
<b>Name:</b>					
<b>Contact Address:</b>					
<b>Tel Number:</b>					
<b>Email:</b>					
<b>Student ID (if applicable):</b>					
<b>Status (please tick)</b>					
<b>Student</b> FE <input type="checkbox"/> HE <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Parent or Guardian</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Staff</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Member of the Public</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Employer</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Organisation</b> <input type="checkbox"/>

**SECTION 1B – Details of person (data subject) on whose behalf you are submitting complaint, if different to above**

<b>Do you have the consent of the data subject to raise this matter? :</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Title:</b>	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms	Other:
<b>Name:</b>		
<b>Contact Address:</b>		
<b>Tel Number:</b>		
<b>Email:</b>		
<b>Student ID (if applicable)</b>		
<b>Status (please tick)</b>		
<b>Student</b> FE <input type="checkbox"/> HE <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Parent or Guardian</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Staff</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
		<b>Member of the Public</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
		<b>Employer</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
		<b>Organisation</b> <input type="checkbox"/>

**SECTION 2**

**Details of Complaint:** Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.

**Have you attempted to resolve this issue informally?** Yes / No  
If Yes, please summarise any action taken to resolve your issue/s to date.

**SECTION 3**

**What do you see as a suitable remedy to address the issue or matter raised?**

**PRIVACY NOTICE:** Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and used for the purpose of investigating your complaint. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a **public task** or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller, e.g. Public Authorities are accountable to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating your complaint (this may include the member of staff who is the subject of the issue). Your information may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website ([Data Protection \(src.ac.uk\)](https://www.src.ac.uk/DataProtection)).

I realise that if I choose not to agree to these terms, the College will be unable to investigate my complaint.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The completed form should be returned to:

**The Corporate Compliance Manager**  
**Southern Regional College**  
**Castlewellan Road**  
**Banbridge**  
**BT32 4AY**  
Email: [feedback@src.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@src.ac.uk)

**Office Use Only**

Date Received:  
Date Acknowledged:  
Received By:  
Responsible Owner:  
Has the consent of the Data Subject Received by the College?  
Date consent of the Data Subject was received by the College:

## APPENDIX 2

**CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS FORM**

If you require assistance with submitting this form, please contact the College's Corporate Compliance Manager.

If we have done something well, we value and appreciate your positive feedback.

<b>Title:</b>	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms	Other:
<b>Name:</b>		
<b>Contact Address:</b>		
<b>Tel Number:</b>		
<b>Email:</b>		
<b>Student ID (if applicable)</b>		
<b>Status (please tick)</b>		
<b>Student</b> FE <input type="checkbox"/> HE <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Parent or Guardian</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Staff</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Member of the Public</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Employer</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Organisation</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Details of Compliment:</b> Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved if known. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.		

**PRIVACY NOTICE:** Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and used for the purpose of recording your compliment. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a **public task** or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller, e.g. Public Authorities are accountable to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with relevant College staff (this may include the member of staff who is the subject of your compliment). Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website ([Data Protection \(src.ac.uk\)](http://src.ac.uk)).

The completed form should be returned to:

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Banbridge  
BT32 4AY  
Email: [feedback@src.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@src.ac.uk)

<b><u>Office Use Only</u></b>	
Date Received:	Date Acknowledged:
Received By:	Responsible Owner:

APPENDIX 3

# Customer Complaints Process

