



**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
UTC[®]**

Buckinghamshire University Technical College

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure

Responsible Officers:	Principal & Business Services Director
Date @ F&GP:	May, 2019
Review date:	Evergreen
Procedure available:	Website/Reception/Learning Centre
Authorised By:	Governing Body/

PROCEDURE FOR COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

The objective of this process is to:

1. Implement the compliments, comments and complaints policy for Bucks UTC
2. Ensure that we respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner as a key part of our customer service strategy
3. Welcome feedback as an opportunity to improve the services that we offer.
4. Encourage a culture of openness around compliments/comments/ complaints
 - a. To direct that complaints should be resolved:
 - as quickly as possible
 - as close to the point of delivery as possible
 - fairly (for all parties)
 - with the minimum of inconvenience to the Complainant
 - in a personal way, observing best practice for customer service
 - b. To ensure that customer compliments, comments and complaints are used to develop overall improvements to the way that we work.

All compliments, comments and complaints will be treated seriously but should be dealt with informally in the first instance whenever possible and addressed at the point of delivery.

Compliments and Comments

All compliments and comments should be properly acknowledged and the customer thanked for their feedback.

- Compliments or comments received in writing should be acknowledged in writing.
- Whoever receives a compliment or comment should pass it on to the Head of Department and cc to the Principal in order that the senior managers in Bucks UTC can understand customer feedback and drive recognition of good performance.
- Not all comments may be positive, minor issues or concerns that perhaps turn in to complaints can be raised in this way.

All team members are involved in customer service, so may be involved in dealing with a negative comment, should work to the following simple formula:

1. Listen
2. Ask questions
3. AGREE a solution – check satisfaction
4. Implement the solution – NOW
5. Follow up and check satisfaction

The aim should be to deal with less significant issues in an informal way at the point of service delivery to ensure a speedy resolution.

Students

In the first instance, students should discuss their issue or concern with their Tutor. Many problems can be resolved with this direct interaction. If an immediate resolution is not possible, or the student is not satisfied with the outcome, they should inform their Personal Tutor or another member of the staff team who will ensure that the matter is investigated informally. The member of staff will try to identify an informal solution to the problem.

If the student is not satisfied with the proposed informal solution, they may choose to then make a formal complaint to the Head of Department responsible for their course.

If a student needs help in making a formal complaint, this can be obtained by contacting a member of the Learning Centre Team.

External Customers

- External customers are individuals, groups or organisations using Bucks UTC facilities and businesses, organisations or individuals that the Bucks UTC works with or has a business relationship with
- Informal feedback should initially be directed to a member of staff within the area where the concern is based.
- However if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome then they may choose to then make a formal complaint to the Head of Department responsible for the area of the complaint

Formal Complaints

If the customer is not satisfied with the informal resolution to the complaint then the formal complaints process begins.

- A formal complaint is one received in writing via letter or email to a member of the Business Services Director (BSD) or the Principal if the BSD is included in the complaint.
- Formal complaints must be logged, investigated and the outcome recorded. The BSD is responsible for monitoring complaints regarding academic matters and non-academic matters so must be made aware of formal complaints as soon as they are received.
- Unless the complaint concerns the Principal, the receiving member of staff or the Complaint Managers will advise the Principal of the brief details (Stage 4 must not be prejudiced). If a complaint is received about the Principal then this will be taken to the Chair of Governors.
- Notes of any telephone conversations must be taken and copies kept of all correspondence
- It is important to ensure confidentiality of the names of any persons mentioned in the complaint.

Stage 1 – Receipt of complaint/processing/immediate response

- Once the complaint has been received, the BSD will decide the appropriate level/person to make the initial investigation – typically this will be the Head of Department. The initial investigation should be started as soon as possible and within 12 working hours of the initial receipt of the complaint.

If the complaint relates directly to a student's welfare or safety then the BSD may opt to run the investigation.

- This person then becomes the owner of the complaint.
- The complaint owner should contact the customer IMMEDIATELY (certainly within 12 hours), to explain that they are dealing with the complaint, to give the customer their contact details and to agree the timeframe for resolution

Stage 2 – Investigation/agreement of resolution/confirmation of resolution

The complaint owner takes the following action:

- Investigate the complaint by interviewing staff or customers as necessary. Notes should be taken of phone calls and meetings
- Consult with their line manager or BSD if appropriate (taking care not to prejudice any escalation procedures).
- Agree the resolution with the customer within two working days of receipt of the complaint or within the previously agreed timeline
- Resolution should be presented/agreed in person where possible or, failing that, by telephone. Resolution should only be first presented in writing if no other contact details are available or if specifically requested by the complainant
- The target timeframe to agree a resolution to a complaint with all customers is **within two working days of receipt**. This may not be possible in complex cases, in which case the customer should be informed of the proposed timeframe to agree a resolution

If the customer is satisfied:

- Inform the BSD of the agreed resolution and follow up in writing to the customer to confirm it within a further 5 working days
- ALL written responses to complainants are to be signed off by the BSD prior to being sent unless specifically agreed otherwise

Stage 3 – Escalation

If the customer remains dissatisfied following the response from the manager the complaint is escalated to the BSD.

- The BSD is now the complaint owner and will do the following:

- Contact the customer within 4 working hours to explain that they are now dealing with the complaint and will be reviewing the “investigation” and to agree the next step – in most cases this will be a face-to-face meeting
- Will write to the customer to confirm that they are dealing with the complaint and to provide a copy of the Bucks UTC Compliments, Comment and Complaints Procedure
- The conclusion of the review will be completed and advised to the customer within 48 hours.

Stage 4 – Appeal

If the customer is still not satisfied after the previous steps they may appeal in writing to the Principal within 14 days. The Principal will consult with colleagues who have been involved in the complaint, meet with the complainant to hear the appeal and give a final decision.

Stage 5 –Final Appeal

In exceptional circumstances if the customer is still not satisfied after the previous steps they may appeal in writing to the Governing Body within 14 days. The Chair of Governors or the Clerk will convene a Governing Body complaints panel.

The Governors’ appeal hearing is the last Bucks UTC-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions.

Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The Governing Body will nominate a number of members where one panel member is independent of the management and running of the UTC; with delegated powers to hear complaints at this stage and set out its terms of reference. These will include:

- Drawing up its procedures;
- Hearing individual appeals;
- Making recommendations on policy as a result of complaints

The procedure adopted by the panel for hearing appeals will be part of the Bucks UTC’s complaints procedure. The panel will be drawn from nominated members and will consist of three people. The panel may choose their own chair.

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the Bucks UTC’s systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any Governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, Governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of Governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the Bucks UTC and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that the complaint has been taken seriously.
- c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is appropriate and not adversarial.
- d. Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Clerk

The Clerk will be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor

The Nominated Governor role:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the Clerk to arrange the panel;

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;
- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Notification of the Panel's Decision

The Chair of the Panel will ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response within 5 working days. The letter will explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

Checklist for a Panel Hearing

The panel will take the following points into account

- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.

- The Principal may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Principal is then invited to explain the Bucks UTC's actions and be followed by the Bucks UTC's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Principal and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Principal is then invited to sum up the Bucks UTC's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale

General Notes on formal complaint handling process

- All complaints will be considered as complaints against Bucks UTC and not against individual members of staff
- Every written communication either from the complainant or from the UTC should be copied to the complaint managers.
- Notes will be kept of meetings; all telephone calls will be logged. The Complaint Managers will retain such documentation, usually the originals if possible.
- The final response should include an explanation to the customer of how to take their complaint further, if necessary
- All complaints will be treated as confidential and will be handled with sensitivity.

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

The Principal will present a termly report to the Senior Leadership Team and an interim and annual report for Bucks UTC Governing Body summarising the complaints during the year. This will be based on an analysis of the year's complaints organised by curriculum area, category of complaint, and type of complainant. The Principal will be responsible for investigating and responding to any queries arising from the annual report to the Bucks UTC Governing Body.

This policy cross-references with the following documents:

- *The Buckinghamshire UTC Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy*

- *The Buckinghamshire UTC Customer Complaint Procedure Flowchart*
- *The Buckinghamshire UTC Student Handbook*

Copies of all documents can be obtained by contacting Reception or the Learning Centre or by accessing the Bucks UTC Website.