

Student Complaints/Comments – Voice of the Learner

1 College Mission Statement

1.1 “Meeting Learner needs and aspiring to excellence”.

2 Guiding Principles

2.1 This Policy is based on the following principles:

- Active promotion of equality of opportunity throughout all college activities and the learning experience
- Provision of an open and transparent process
- Resolution of complaints in a fair and equitable way within agreed timescales
- Absence of victimisation once a complaint has been reported
- Continuous service improvement as part of the College’s quality strategy

2.2 Doncaster College Student Complaint Procedure (“the Procedure”) is intended to bring matters of concern about Doncaster College (“the College”) to the attention of the College managers and enable the efficient investigation of those concerns. The person making any complaint feels aggrieved with the College, dealing with the complaint courteously and effectively can do much to restore the person’s confidence in the College for the future.

2.3 Having a comments/complaints procedure, understood and followed by all members of the College, is essential if complaints are to be handled consistently.

2.4 The purpose of a comments/complaints system is to listen to the voice of the learner and focus on resolving complaints quickly. Some complaints will be dealt with on the spot, many will require a full and thorough investigation.

2.5 This procedure is open to all students of the College (but not any other third party unless the student gives their written permission).

Complaints will be dealt with either:

- A. Informally by any member of staff either immediately at the point of the complaint. This encourages speedy response and ownership of complaints.
- B. Formally by the appropriate Senior Manager who will log and co-ordinate all formal complaints.

3 Definition

Definition of Complaint

- 3.1 The complaints procedure is the process by which students are given the opportunity to seek resolution to perceived injustices relating to their experience or attendance at college, that have not been resolved as part of their normal interaction with staff at the college.
- 3.2 A complaint is defined as an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction about an aspect of a service or facility provided by the College, which is provided to students.

Anonymous Complaints

- 3.3 Complaints require investigation to enable resolution; where a complaint is made anonymously, it will not be possible to undertake such an investigation. For practical reasons, therefore, normally no action will be taken in the event of complaints made anonymously. There may, however, be exceptional circumstances where the College deems it appropriate to take action or investigate a matter on the basis of a complaint that is made anonymously.

Third Party Complaints

- 3.4 Unless special circumstances apply, no investigation of a complaint made on behalf of a student will be undertaken without that student's written agreement to the concerns raised, and their written consent for an investigation to be carried out. This includes complaints made by the parent or spouse of the student concerned.

Vexatious or Malicious Complaints

- 3.5 The College may consider invoking the College's Disciplinary Procedure in those cases where complaints are found to be vexatious or malicious. A vexatious or malicious complaint is defined as a complaint which is patently unsustainable, having been put forward so as to abuse the process of the Procedure or, for example, to attempt to defame the name or character of another person.

Group Complaints

- 3.6 Where a complaint is brought by a group of students, one person should be prepared to act as spokesperson and correspondent for the purposes of the Formal Procedure, and each member of the group must be able to demonstrate that they have been personally affected by the matter which is the subject of the complaint. In addition, all complainants must agree in writing to the spokesperson acting on their behalf.

COMPLAINTS

4 Scope and Purpose

- 4.1 The Complaints Procedure aims to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved, with informal resolution an option at any point. Complaints will be handled sensitively and with due consideration to confidentiality for all involved. Any person named in a complaint will be informed of the substance of the complaint at an appropriate point and will have the right to reply as part of the investigation. Detailed information contained within the complaint will be made available only to those involved in its resolution. Summaries of complaints are recorded for quality assurance purposes.
- 4.2 This policy applies to all aspects of the College experience, all forms of teaching and learning and all activities where learning takes place.
- 4.3 This policy should be read in conjunction with all other College Policies.

5 Policy

- 5.1 No complainant of the College bringing a complaint under this Procedure, whether successfully or otherwise, will be treated less favourably by anyone at the College than if the complaint had not been brought. If evidence to the contrary is found in this regard those treating the complainant less favourably may be subject to disciplinary proceedings under the College Disciplinary Policy.
- 5.2 It is expected that, except in exceptional and fully documented circumstances, anyone who wishes to make a complaint will invoke the Informal Procedure within one calendar month of the incident which is the cause for complaint.
- 5.3 The College confirms that it will listen to and investigate all complaints that clearly express the nature of their complaint and the remedy sought. Director of Quality and Raising Standards shall be entitled to dismiss at an early stage, complaints where no prima facie case has been made out. All complaints will be investigated thoroughly and fairly. The information obtained by the College through its investigation of complaints will be used to improve its services.
- 5.4 If the complaint is of a criminal nature, the matter will be immediately referred to the Principal who may, where appropriate, inform the police.
- 5.5 The Principal will be kept informed of all complaints received against the College concerning student welfare.
- 5.6 The confidentiality of all parties to a complaint shall be respected.
- 5.7 In the event of a serious complaint from a student under 18 in college Residential accommodation their parents/guardians will be entitled to involve an independent person / body such as Ofsted.

COMPLAINTS

6 Monitoring, Review and Dissemination

- 6.1 Students will be made aware of this Procedure prior to accepting a place on a course at the College.

Equality & Diversity Impact Assessment – Race Equality

The implications for Race Equality are that the College will monitor complaints by age, ethnicity, gender and disability.

7 Responsibility

- 7.1 All staff are responsible for ensuring that complaints are responded to within the agreed timescales.
- 7.2 Director of Quality and Raising Standards will provide termly reports to the Strategic Quality Group and the Curriculum Quality and Performance Committee of Governors.
- 7.3 Director of Quality and Raising Standards is responsible for updating the policy.
- 7.4 The Directorate of Quality and Raising Standards will administer and monitor in relation to adherence to timescales and exceptions reporting and identified trends to the Strategic Quality Group.

COMPLAINTS

PROCEDURE

Appendix 1

How to make a Complaint

Complaints can be made in person or over the telephone to any member of college staff who will:

Procedure

1. Take down details of the complaint and try to resolve it informally; or
2. If they are not the appropriate person to deal with the complaint, they will pass the matter on to the most suitable person to deal with it. Your complaint will be acknowledged within seven days with you being informed on who will be dealing with the matter.
3. Investigating the complaint should take no more than 14 working days. If it takes more than 14 working days, you will be contacted and given an estimated completion date or a date by which you will receive a further update.
4. Where appropriate the member of college staff dealing with your complaint will notify Director of Quality and Raising Standards of the steps being taken.
5. If you require further help or advice at any stage of the complaint, you can contact any member of college staff.
6. If the outcome of the Informal Procedure is not considered by the student bringing the complaint to be satisfactory, the student may invoke the Formal Procedure by completing the, Complaints and Compliments Feedback Form and submitting it to Director of Quality and Raising Standards. The form should detail the grounds for complaint, together with a statement of what has been done by the student to attempt resolution within the College under the Informal Procedure and why the action taken by the College has been inadequate. The form of resolution or redress sought should also be clearly indicated. An acknowledgement of receipt of the form will be despatched within seven working days.
7. The complaint will be investigated and, if appropriate, an attempt at resolution at this stage, either by correspondence or direct negotiation between the parties involved will take place. Facilitation of a mediation meeting between the student concerned (who may be accompanied by a friend or representative) and the College or any other way which may aid resolution will be undertaken. The circumstances of the complaint will dictate which of these methods is considered most likely to result in a resolution of the complaint.
8. It is anticipated that the investigation will normally be completed, with a response in writing from an appropriate Senior Manager within 14 working days of the receipt date of the completed Complaint Form. This timescale may need to be extended during College holidays.

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9. Appeal Stage

If the complainant is not satisfied with the College's decision in the Formal Procedure stage, they may appeal this decision in the following way.

1. By a request in writing, within ten working days from the date of the notification of the outcome of the Formal Stage. The request should be addressed to Director of Quality and Raising Standards outlining why the outcome of the Formal Stage was not satisfactory. Taking into account the substance of the complaint and the previous attempts at resolution, the case will then be reviewed. A decision on whether or not it is appropriate to refer the matter to a Complaint Appeal Hearing will then be determined.
2. Should a Complaint Appeal Hearing be necessary it will be convened by the Director of Quality and Raising Standards. All panel members shall be independent having had no dealings with the complaint previously. The student may be accompanied by a friend or representative at this meeting and the College may be represented by up to two members.
3. If the complaint relates to the actions of an individual member of the College, that individual has the right to be informed of the substance of the complaint and to attend and be represented.
4. The Complaint Appeals Panel shall meet, normally within one calendar month (excluding College vacations) of the request in writing for an appeal where such an appeal has been granted. Decisions made by the Complaint Appeal Panel shall be communicated to the student and the College within one calendar month of the Complaint Appeal Panel hearing. The Chair will keep all parties informed of progress and will explain reasons for any necessary extension of the timescale, for example, if an adjournment in the proceedings is necessary.
5. The outcome of the Complaint Appeals Panel is final.

COMPLAINTS

INTERNAL GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

Annex A

Procedure

Complaints made in person or over the telephone

1. Take the complainant's name, address, telephone number and, if appropriate, course details.
2. Give your name and work telephone number (or a number where a message may be left) so that the person making the complaint can contact you again.
3. Take down details of the complaint and try to resolve it yourself, or locally.
4. If you feel you are not the appropriate person to deal with the complaint, tell them that you will pass on the matter to the most suitable person to deal with it, giving their name. However, you must acknowledge the complaint within seven working days giving details of who will be dealing with the matter.
5. Investigating the complaint should take no more than 14 working days.
6. If it takes more than 14 working days, contact the complainant and give an estimated completion date or a date by which he/she will hear from you again. If targets are going to be missed, it's important to keep the complainant informed and updated on progress.
7. In cases where the complaint is of some significance, you should notify Director of Quality and Raising Standards of the steps being taken.
8. If the complainant requires further help or advice, explain that he/she can contact any member of college staff.

Complaints made in Writing

9. Written complaints should be dealt with by staff as described in 6-8 above. However, it is likely that written complaints will be addressed to Director of Quality and Raising Standards. All written complaints should be treated as formal complaints and a copy of the complaint, together with the action taken, should be lodged in the appropriate Complaints File.

Any member of staff who is dealing with a complaint should:

- not concede that there is fault on the part of any third person until that third person has had a chance to respond to any allegations;
- keep written records of the name of the complainant and her or his course, the date and time the complaint was raised, the nature of the complaint, the advice given and any action taken, and deposit copies of the records in the Complaints File;
- not only try to remedy any fault but should also look into the background circumstances which caused the fault and try to ensure that procedures are modified to avoid any fault occurring again;

COMPLAINTS

- make arrangements, if necessary, for all concerned to receive advice and support;
- ensure that the financial or personal details of all concerned will be dealt with in confidence;
- compile a record of the complaint and the outcome and lodge it in the Complaints File.