

MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE



Somerset College

Curriculum Service/Area All Curriculum Areas and Support Services

Subject Formal Customer Complaints Procedure

Date July 2011

Revision/Issue 9 Issue 11

Procedure No. SQP 5.14

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Purpose - This procedure describes how formal complaints made to Somerset College are dealt with, recorded and resolved. It is used when informal complaints fail to produce a satisfactory outcome or when the complaint is sufficiently serious to warrant complaining in writing.

Complaints will be treated seriously and students will not suffer any disadvantage or recrimination as a result of making a complaint in good faith. Complaints of a frivolous, vexatious or with malice, will not be dealt with.

Scope – The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) defines a complaint as *'the expression of a specific concern about the provision of a course/module or a programme of study, or a related academic service'*. Somerset College has taken this a step further and defines a complaint as *'an expression of dissatisfaction or omission concerning a service provided by Somerset College, or the manner in which the service was provided'*. Any person who is receiving a service provided by the College or who has received such a service within the last month may complain within the context of this procedure. Complaints of harassment and other issues that come under Equal Opportunities are also covered by this procedure.

Complaints concerning events that happened more than one month ago can only be dealt with in exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the Principal & Chief Executive.

The Principal & Chief Executive retains the right to deal directly with any complaints; however, the nature of the complaint and action taken should be notified to the relevant Executive member, together with all applicable dates.

Responsibilities - The overall responsibility for the effective and efficient handling of complaints lies with the **Principal & Chief Executive** who delegates this responsibility to the **Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality (VP C&Q)**. The VP C&Q is responsible for the control and monitoring of this procedure. The **Quality Improvement Coordinator (QIC)** is responsible for ensuring the process is completed, the database is updated and reports are produced for the appropriate committees. Complaints relating to the College's Open University (OU) students will be reported to the College's Academic Quality & Standards Committee and annually to the OU.

Procedure

1. Is this the right procedure to use?

- 1.1 In the first instance, the student must decide whether this complaints procedure is the most appropriate route to choose.
 - 1.1.1 For example, if an OU student is dissatisfied with a decision made by an assessment board, then Management Procedure SQP3.16 'Academic Appeal Procedure for Open University students' should be followed. If the complaint also incorporates an appeal, the complaint will be dealt with before the Appeal is put to the Academic Appeals Committee.
 - 1.1.2 For FE students, either:
 - Management Procedure SQP3.14 'Appeal against a College Final or End of Session Assessment',

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- or Management Procedure SQP3.15 'Appeal against a Decision on the Assessment/Grading of an Individual Course Assignment' should be followed.

2. How the complaint is dealt with

- 2.1 All formal complaints must be forwarded to the QIC for processing
- 2.2 All formal complaints received will be dealt with and addressed by the Manager within whose area the complaint is lodged. Should this manager be the subject of the complaint then another appropriate member of staff will have the responsibility of addressing the issue.
- 2.3 Refer to appendix A: Flowchart which summarises the complaints process

3. Processing complaints and timeframes

- 3.1 The QIC enters the details of the complaint onto the Windows database Complaints Handling System (CAMS)
- 3.2 Within **5 working days** of receipt of the complaint, the QIC will send an acknowledgement letter to the complainant stating the date by which a response to the complaint may be anticipated and, if appropriate, who the appointed manager will be who will be dealing with the matter.
- 3.3 The Manager responsible for responding to the complaint contacts the complainant in writing, outlining the response to the complaint.
- 3.4 Where possible, formal complaints will be cleared within **10 working days of receipt**, this may have to be staged depending on the severity and nature of the complaint. In the event that the response takes longer to complete, a holding letter will be sent to the complainant advising when a full response will be made.
- 3.5 The QIC collates all the internal reports and any documentation relevant to the complaint.

4. Review of the outcome of a complaint:- Process

- 4.1 If the complainant is not totally satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may request a review of the formal decision made.
- 4.2 A request to review the decision made must normally be submitted by the complainant in writing to the Principal & Chief Executive within one calendar month of the date of despatch of the final response. The complainant must state the actual action(s) or redress option(s) to review against and the grounds for such a review.
- 4.3 The VP C&Q or the Principal will review the formal decision made.

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4.4 The VP C&Q or the Principal will inform the complainant in writing within 10 (ten) working days of the decision that has been made.

5. Appeal to external organisations

5.1 If the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome of this review he/she may then appeal to the appropriate external organisation.

5.1.1 Further Education (FE) learners:

- Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).
Email to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- To the funding body if publicly funded:- Skills Funding Agency (SfA).
Email to complaintsteam@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk
- Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA) contact www.ypla.gov.uk

5.1.2 Higher Education (HE) students should appeal to the institution who validates their qualification, for example, University of Plymouth (UoP) students should address their appeal to the UoP; Open University (OU) students should address their appeal to the OU.

5.2.3 In the event that these avenues have been exhausted then HE students may take their appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), by contacting www.oiahe.org.uk or to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) by contacting www.hefce.ac.uk

6. Monitoring

6.1 On completion of the complaint it is categorised by the degree of severity:

➤ Critical

- College Insurers notified
- Involves litigation
- Legal action taken

➤ Serious

- Complaint results in staff or student disciplinary measures being taken

➤ Substantiated

- Complaint was justified, may result in, for example:
 - amendment to management procedures
 - staff training/refresher course
 - improved communications

➤ Not substantiated

- Complaint not justified

➤ Constructive Criticism

- Where the complaint is seen as being suggestions on ways to improve which can be used in
 - strategic planning and decision making

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- improve customer services

7. Reports

7.1 Reports will be produced on a regular basis and presented to the Senior Management Team and other appropriate committees, for example the Curriculum & Quality Committee and the Academic Quality & Standards Committee.

Formulation This management procedure was reviewed by the Quality Improvement Coordinator in consultation with the HE Quality & Development Manager, the Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality and the Senior Management Team.

Documentation

- Formal Complaint Form SQF 5.14

Review – This procedure will be reviewed within three (3) years of the approval date or as required in response to changes in legislation or college organisation.

Authorised by

Approved by

.....
Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality

.....
The Principal

Date

Date

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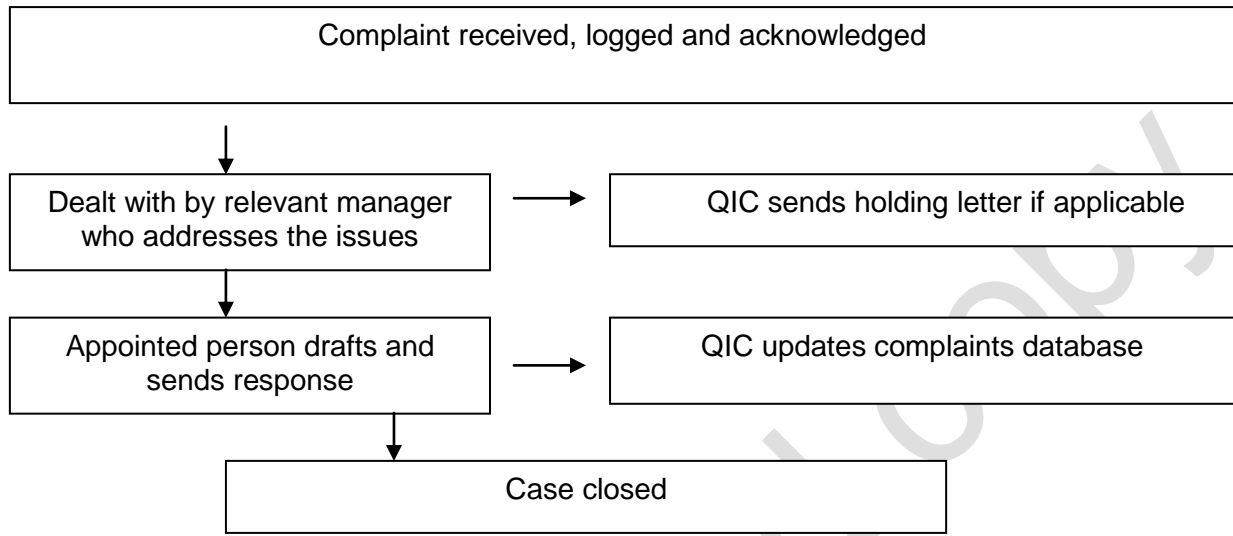
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Appendix A

Flowchart for dealing with formal complaints, review and appeal process



Request for a review of the complaint decision

