

HARLOW COLLEGE

Complaints Procedure

Complaints Procedure

1. Policy for dealing with complaints

The following principles for dealing with complaints have been agreed by the College:

- 1.1 The Complaints system should be easily accessible
- 1.2 It should be simple to understand and use, and its operation will be regularly reviewed
- 1.3 Complaints received will be acknowledged
- 1.4 All complaints will receive a full and fair investigation
- 1.5 A response will normally be sent within 15 days of receipt, subsequent to the outcomes of the investigation
- 1.6 Subject to the need for thorough investigation, the procedures will respect people's desire for confidentiality
- 1.7 The College response will address all the points at issue, and will attempt to provide effective and appropriate redress where fault on the part of the College has been acknowledged
- 1.8 Where relevant, the College will want to learn from complaints and provide appropriate information to managers within the college so that services can be improved, and systems altered where needed
- 1.9 An analysis of complaints including ethnicity will be carried out annually, and will be reported to the Corporation

2. Complaints Procedure

- 2.1 Generally, when complaints are received, they are sent directly to the Executive Office and will be dealt with by the member of Executive responsible for complaints.
- 2.2 Normally an acknowledgement letter will be sent to the complainant within 3 days of receipt
- 2.3 The details of the complaint will be entered onto a computerised database.
- 2.4 A copy of the details will be sent to appropriate managers for investigation, and provision of a report to the member of Executive responsible for complaints within 8 days. The report should provide:
 - i. Full details of the outcome of the investigation,
 - ii. A recommendation whether they believe the complaint is: Upheld/ Partially upheld / Not upheld.
 - iii. Any actions proposed to deal with issues raised and necessary to avoid this happening in the future
- 2.5 On receipt of the report of the investigation, the member of Executive responsible will prepare a response including determining if a refund of fees is appropriate. If the complainant is an HE student the response will include

a CS1 form (Complaint Stage 1) and Completion of Procedures letter (COP) will be sent to the complainant once the investigation is finalised.

- 2.6 When the complainant has been finally informed, a copy of the final letter responding to the complaint will be sent, for information, to the appropriate managers.
- 2.7 A copy of the Avoiding Future Complaints Form will be sent to any relevant managers to inform them how this type of complaint can be avoided in future.
- 2.8 The final completion date will be entered on to the database record in addition to the number of days taken to complete. (This information will be used to analyse the complaints system at a later date and reported to the Corporation annually).
- 2.9 Where a follow-up letter has been received, a note of this will also need to be entered on to the database, as will the date of any holding letter sent. It may be that the complaint will require to be re-circulated using the system outlined above.
- 2.10 As letters frequently mention individual staff by name, and as student files are open to access by many staff, correspondence on complaints will not be kept in student personal files. It should also be remembered that parents of students up to the age of eighteen have a right to see the student file if they give appropriate notice. It may be necessary to transfer new information or make corrections to the student file as an outcome of an investigation leading from the complaint, then that should be undertaken separately.

3. Guidelines on redress

The following range of responses will enable the College to ensure that responses are fair and impartial, and demonstrates to users that it welcomes comments on the quality of its service:

- a. Expression of regret whenever possible and appropriate
- b. Apology when fault on the part of the College is identified
- c. Correction of organisational deficiency where appropriate, which will be recognised in the response, where appropriate
- d. Maximum liability is normally limited to the refund of any fees or charges already paid if the College is found liable for not providing an adequate service, subject to the Member of Executive's discretion.

4. Appeals

- 4.1 In the event that a complainant is dissatisfied with the decision taken by the Member of Executive responsible for complaints, and decides to appeal, the Principal will review the documentation and will carry out any further investigation deemed necessary, and will decide to either endorse or modify the decision, and will inform the complainant accordingly. If the complainant is an HE student a Completion of Procedures letter will be sent to the complainant.
- 4.2 The complainant must appeal (in writing) within 15 working days of receiving the formal response.

- 4.3 In the event that a complainant (FE student) remains dissatisfied, they will be advised of their right to appeal to the SFA, and will be given all necessary contact details.
- 4.4 In the event that a complainant (HE student) remains dissatisfied, they will be advised of their right to appeal to the OIA (Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education), and will be given all necessary contact details in the Completion of Procedures (COP) letter. The Complainant has up to a year from the COP letter date to make a complaint to the OI. All records must be kept.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES FLOWCHART

COMPLAINT RECEIVED AND PASSED TO EXECUTIVE OFFICE TO BE DEALT WITH BY THE MEMBER OF EXECUTIVE RESPONSIBLE FOR COMPLAINTS

- Complaint logged on complaints system
- PSN number recorded if appropriate
- Summary form produced to send to relevant Academy/Area manager for investigation

Acknowledgement sent to complainant within 3 days.

Is the complaint about a member of staff?

NO

YES

- A copy of the complaint must be sent to HR for monitoring purposes
- Complaints involving members of staff must be **confidentially** passed to the SMT member responsible for their area to investigate

Completed summary form and complaint sent to the appropriate Academy/Area Manager to investigate.

- Report to be produced within 8 days and returned to Executive office
- Report must give full details and indication whether they believe the complaint is: Upheld / Partially upheld / Not upheld
- If found to be upheld or partially, report must state what steps will be taken to avoid this in future

Decision taken if refund should be offered?

NO

YES

- Refund to be authorised by the member of Executive with financial responsibilities
- Passed to AFS to raise a cheque
- Cheque posted to complainant separately to avoid delay in replying to complainant
- Letter advising of outcome send to complainant (within 15 days where possible)

- Letter advising of outcome send to complainant (within 15 days where possible)
- Copy of response letter sent to complainant to be sent to the Academy/Area Manager dealing with the complaint

Complaint finalised. Section Below

Complaints system updated and analysis of complaints reported at the Corporation meeting at least annually.

Copy of Avoiding Future Complaints Form to be prepared from details given after investigation and sent to all relevant Managers to inform them how this can be avoided in future.

Tracking and Reference Information

Date Effective From: February 2017

Review Date: 3 years

Author/Responsibility: Executive member responsible for Complaints

Equality Impact Assessment: 12 February 2013

Related Documents:

Staff Disciplinary Procedure

Grievance Policy

Grievance Procedure

Equality & Diversity Policy

Harlow College Charter

Complaints: If you wish to submit a complaint about the application of this policy or the procedure of it, please send your request in accordance with the provisions of the Grievance Procedure.

Monitoring: The application of this policy and associated procedure will be monitored by the Executive member responsible for Complaints/Standards Committee.

Easy Reading: To receive this policy/procedure in a different format, please contact HR Services