



Bolton College

**Complaints Policy
2022-24**



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1. Introduction

Bolton College welcomes feedback from students, employers and members of the public about courses, services, facilities and other matters for which the College is responsible. All formal complaints will be fully investigated sensitively and our aim is to respond quickly, positively and to reach an outcome that is satisfactory and fair for all concerned. The information gained as a result of these investigations will be used in the pursuit of corrective action and/or continual improvement and also gives us the opportunity to make any necessary adjustments to our systems and processes.

This policy aims to ensure that our responsibilities to protect children and vulnerable adults are met and any complaint received which triggers a safeguarding issue will be passed immediately to the designated safeguarding officer.

Where a complaint is made by somebody other than the student the complaint relates to, and the student is over 18 years of age, the College must receive permission in writing from the student involved to share their personal details. The student at any point can also request for the College to retract this permission and no further communication will be made with the original complainant.

There are a number of informal channels through which most problems can be resolved. However, if an individual feels it is necessary, after following the informal route, to pursue a complaint formally, they can be assured that we will treat it seriously and impartially.

A complaint must be made within 3 months of the event that gave rise to it.

There is a separate complaints procedure for students on a Higher Level 4 course, including all HNCs, HNDs, Foundation Degrees and Higher Apprenticeships. These documents can be found on the College website:

www.boltoncollege.ac.uk/about-us/governance/he-strategies.

2. Informal Complaint

Most issues are usually quickly resolved and unlikely to require an in-depth investigation. They can be directed to any relevant member of staff in order to seek a resolution e.g.

- Teacher/Work Based Tutor
- Curriculum Leader
- Other appropriate member of staff

Student Experience or reception staff can assist in identifying the correct member of staff if you are unsure who to speak with

3. Formal Complaint

When it is felt that an issue has not been resolved satisfactorily through the informal route, you may make a formal complaint.

The College aims to balance the rights of the complainant and those of any person complained against; all parties must be treated with fairness and dignity. If, however, a complaint which is not upheld was found to have been made maliciously, a learner may be subject to a stage of the Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy.

Formal complaints may be made in the following way:-

When it is felt that an issue has not been resolved at the informal stage, the complainant should then complete a Complaint form online at:

<http://www.boltoncc.ac.uk/pub/complaint.php>

Students may visit Student Experience for assistance if required.

All formal complaints completed online or electronically will automatically be received by the Principalship who will nominate an Investigating Officer requesting that the complaint be investigated within 20 working days. The Investigating Officer will normally be a member of the College Management Team. An acknowledgement will be sent to the complainant, within 3 working days of receiving a complaint, with the name of Investigating Officer to whom the complaint has been passed.

All complaints regarding a member of staff will be referred to the Human Resources (HR) Department who will advise on a correct course of action.

The Investigating Officer will fully investigate the complaint and respond to the complainant, via the Principalship. To resolve the complaint, it may be necessary for the Investigating Officer to arrange a meeting with the complainant or discuss the issue by phone or to respond by letter or email.

If, in the unusual circumstance that a response is not received from the Investigating Officer within the 20 working day period the Deputy Principal will discuss the delay with the appropriate personnel.

If a more extensive investigation is required which may be lengthy, the complainant should be informed, with a clear indication of when they can expect to hear from the College again with an outcome.

A letter will be sent to the complainant outlining the responses and resolution to the complaint. The relevant Director will also be made aware at this stage of the response to the complaint.

If there is no response from the complainant within 10 working days the complaint will be closed.

Complaints from higher education students are referred to the higher education quality leader in conjunction with the relevant head of area. The HE quality leader is charged with ensuring that the complaint is managed in accordance with the requirements of the UK Quality Code and the Office for Independent Adjudicators (OIA) The complaint is closed, when satisfactorily resolved, by the Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Quality. There are different Policies, Procedures and Guidance Notes available for higher education

complaints and these are also available on this section of our website.

4. Dissatisfaction with the Initial Resolution of a Formal Complaint

Complainants who are dissatisfied have the right to appeal against the outcome of the complaint. This should be lodged with the Principalship. The grounds of appeal and any actions sought must be clearly stated at the time of making the appeal. A member of the Senior Management Team, or their nominee, will consider whether:

- New evidence or circumstances have become known, which could not have reasonably been known at the time of the complaint
- The investigation was not conducted fairly or as per procedure and this affected the outcome
- The decision and outcome of the complaint were unreasonable

We aim to conclude the appeals process within 10 working days of receiving the details however, this may be extended where an investigation is complex and will take longer to resolve, or where there are time constraints due to half term holidays, annual leave, college shutdown etc.

We will contact the complainant with the outcome. This decision constitutes the final stage of the College Complaint Procedure and Policy.

Where the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the appeal and the complaint is in relation to ESFA or GMCA funded provision, then a further complaint may be made to that funding body. More information is available on the links below.

ESFA:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>

GMCA:

<https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/2961/complaints-procedure-for-gmca-funded-aeb.pdf>

5. Timescales for Making a Complaint

Complaints should be made as soon as possible and within 3 months of the event, action or issue causing dissatisfaction.

6. Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure)

The College has a Public Interest Disclosure Policy which enables staff to raise concerns internally in a confidential fashion about fraud, malpractice, health and safety, criminal offences, miscarriages of justice, failure to comply with legal obligations or unethical conduct. The full Public Interest Disclosure Policy can be found via the intranet or by contacting the Human Resources Team.

7. Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk

It may be that an incident relates to the physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect of someone under the age of 18 or someone who is deemed to be a “adult at risk”.

Therefore, disclosures of this kind to any members of staff (including the College Counselling Service) may not remain confidential, as the person “at risk” may require protection.

If you wish to report or discuss this type of incident, in the first instance please contact any of the following via the reception staff:

- Tracey Kavanaugh, Safeguarding Manager
- Stephen Mellow, Safeguarding Support Officer
- Jane Marsh, Executive Director of Human Resources & Estates

8. Aggressive or Abusive Complaints

The College is committed to dealing with all complainants fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service, but it is not expected that staff should have to tolerate behaviour which is considered to be unacceptable, for example, any communication which is:

- Abusive, offensive, defamatory or distressing
- Aggressive, threatening, coercive, malicious or intimidating
- Unreasonably persistent or demanding

Where a complainant continues to behave in a way that is considered unacceptable, it may be decided to terminate contact with them. This may mean that the College will not continue with the handling of their complaint.

9. Anonymous Complaints

The College will not normally deal with the anonymous complaints and will do so only exceptionally at the College’s discretion. If complainants do not provide us with a contact name and address/telephone number/e-mail the complaint cannot be processed.

10. Complaints Reporting

The Head of Quality and Student Experience Manager will write a report routinely for the Senior Management Team providing anonymous details of the number and nature of complaints dealt with during the preceding month. Additionally, a similar annual report for the Standards and Performance Committee will be produced.