

Comments, Suggestions and Complaints Policy and Procedure



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Lead policy manager: Customer Services Manager

Status: Live

1. INTRODUCTION

Hackney Community College aims to provide high quality services that meet the needs of our learners, staff and our wider communities.

We welcome comments, complaints and suggestions from all members of the College community, from prospective students and from the general public. All complaints and suggestions are taken seriously and are not regarded as a criticism of individuals.

The complaints and suggestions procedure has been developed to encourage constructive comments, so that we can make adjustments to and improve the way we work.

The procedure is based on a shared understanding of how we would all like to be treated if we need to make a complaint or a suggestion. This includes being:

- taken seriously and listened to courteously
- assisted in explaining and clarifying the problem
- told who is dealing with the feedback and when a reply can be expected
- given a full and prompt response
- kept informed of progress and receiving an explanation of any delay
- advised on what to do next if you are still unhappy.

2. COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY STATEMENT

We will take all complaints & suggestions seriously and promise to:

- Deal with all complaints and suggestions fairly and as quickly as possible.

Regarding complaints, we will:

- Send an acknowledgement within **10 working days** of receipt of the written complaint, if we cannot deal with the complaint/suggestion immediately;
- Provide a written response within **14 working days** wherever possible;
- Provide a confidential service, in that only staff or students who need to be will be consulted or interviewed.

The timescales detailed in the procedure will be adhered to wherever possible. In certain circumstances it may not be possible to give a full response within the time indicated but the College will keep the complainant informed of progress made in investigating a complaint.

3. DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT

The College's definition of a complaint is:

'Any expression of dissatisfaction, however expressed, which a learner or prospective learner/carer/guardian wishes to be treated as a complaint, will be seen as such. If in doubt it is a complaint.'

This definition is deliberately quite broad because it is up to the complainant, not the College, to define what is and what is not a complaint.

3.1 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SERVICE REQUEST AND A COMPLAINT

There can often be confusion between what constitutes a complaint and what represents a request for a service. When a person makes a first request for a service this is not a complaint. The request only becomes a complaint if the person gets in touch again to point out that the service requested has not been addressed. For example a request for a post-box in the college is not a complaint. However, a protest that shows that nothing has been done about the request is a complaint.

4. AIMS OF THE COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The aim of the procedure is that it will be:

- Open to anyone who wishes to make a complaint or suggestion about the college including its courses and learning environment and the overall service provided;
- Easily accessible and well publicised;
- Simple to understand and use;
- Speedy, with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of progress;
- Fair, with a full and impartial investigation;
- Confidential, for the protection of both staff and complainants;
- Effective in addressing all the points at issue and providing appropriate redress;
- Informative, providing information to management so that services can be improved.

5. HACKNEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Hackney Community College is committed to the continuous improvement of the services it provides.

We recognise that, occasionally, expectations will not be met or our services will not meet individual's requirements. For these reasons it is College policy that all

complaints made against the College (or the services it offers) suggestions should be:

- Treated seriously and in an open manner;
- Acknowledged immediately, preferably in writing within 10 working days
- Investigated and/or resolved, wherever that is reasonably practicable, within 14 working days;
- Used as feedback to improve the service #.

This policy applies to all learners, staff and visitors to the College, including contractors working on the College site.

Notes on external procedures:

In matters regarding the correct application of the course as set out by an external awarding body, the complainant may contact the awarding body, which may conduct an investigation. This could be in addition to, or in place of, the College's own complaints procedure.

Complaints relating to employment law will be dealt with under the relevant policy and therefore are not covered by this policy.

6. WHO 'OWNS' A COMPLAINT OR SUGGESTION

Ownership is about taking responsibility for a complaint or suggestion. The person who receives a complaint or suggestion is responsible for ensuring that it reaches the Complaints and Suggestions Officer, within the Customer Services team. If you have received a complaint or suggestion, the answer is that **you own it** until it has been successfully handed over with it being dated, stamped and initialled.

If the Complaints and Suggestions Officer is away other members of the Customer Services team will administer the complaints or suggestions received.

7. INFORMAL PROCESS AND THE FOUR FORMAL STAGES OF THE PROCEDURE

7.1 INFORMAL PROCESS

In the first instance the learner should speak to their personal tutor, a Student Liaison Officer, a member of staff in Customer Services, or a College Manager who may be able to resolve the complaint immediately. This is known as Front Line Resolution of a complaint and must still be noted so that all complaints are monitored, whether formal or informal. If the complaint can't be resolved immediately, the formal procedure will be followed.

7.2 FORMAL PROCESS Stage 1

The College recognises that the people who can best deal with most complaints are those who provide the service. At Stage 1 the complaint should therefore be handled by the manager. The Complaints Form or letter will be acknowledged by the

Complaints Officer within **10 working days** after receiving it and the Complaints Officer will specify the appropriate person who will investigate the complaint.

Either the Complaints and Suggestions Officer or a relevant member of College Staff will investigate matters and respond directly within a further 14 working days.

Stage 2

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response at Stage 1, for whatever reason, they have the right to have their complaint considered at Stage 2. A stage two complaint must be received within 10 working days of receiving the College's stage one response. The complaint will be considered by a relevant senior manager who was not involved at stage 1. The evidence will be reviewed, a further investigation undertaken if necessary and a written response provided where possible, **within 14 working days**. This will be the final stage at which a manager linked to the department carries out investigations.

Stage 3

If the complainant remains unhappy after the response at Stage 2, they have the right to have their complaint independently reviewed by writing to the Complaints Officer within **14 working days** of receipt of the Stage 2 response, outlining the grounds for the appeal. The appeal will be considered by either the Borough Principal* or a Governor of the College. Where the Borough Principal has considered the matter at Stage 2, the appeal will be to a College governor.

Stage 3 complaints are co-ordinated by the Borough Principal's office. The investigating executive manager or governor will undertake a thorough review of the complaint and how it has been handled at each stage; the final outcome agreed with the relevant department's management or by the Chief Executive before the complainant is informed.

**The Governors of the College have delegated responsibility to the Borough Principal to carry out the final stage of the Complaints Procedure where appropriate and where s/he has not investigated the matter at Stage 2 of the procedure.*

8. APPEALS

Where the complainant would like to appeal the final decision of the College, he or she may do so by writing to the relevant education and skills agency or adjudicator. The contact details of the relevant agency will be provided by the Complaints and Suggestions Officer or the Customer Services Manager.

If the appeal is relating to an academic issue that cannot be resolved through the College's complaints procedure, it would become an **academic appeal**, subject to the appeals process of the relevant awarding body or, as relevant, the partner organisation or university. There will be reference to this process in relevant course handbooks, and students will be informed through tutorials. If students need information for this process, the Complaints and Suggestions Officer or the Customer Services Manager will be happy to help.

9. HIGHER EDUCATION

For students enrolled on the College's higher education programme(s).

- 9.1 Once the appeal against complaint outcome stage has been completed, you are entitled to ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator ([OIA](#)) the independent ombudsman service of last resort, to look at your complaint. All applications to the OIA must be made within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter issued by the College to the student.
- 9.2 The [OIA](#) considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of the College's internal complaints procedure. The [OIA](#) looks at issues such as whether the College followed its procedures, whether these procedures were reasonable, and whether the College's final decision was reasonable in all the circumstances. The College will respond to any [OIA](#) enquires in line with [OIA](#) timeframes. The [OIA](#) cannot normally look at complaints:
- Where the student has not progressed through all stages of the College's complaints procedures
 - Where the complaint refers to matters more than three years old
 - Where the Completion of Procedures letter is received outside the twelve month time limit
 - Where matters have been or are being considered in court.

Full details of the scheme are available at www.oiahe.org.uk

Suggestions, comments and complaints may be submitted in the following ways: By

email to: complaints@hackney.ac.uk

or suggestions@hackney.ac.uk

Or you can also write to us at the following address:

Hackney Community College
Suggestions and Complaints Officer
Customer Services Department
Shoreditch Campus
Falkirk Street
LONDON
N1 6HQ

Telephone: 020 7613 9123

Forms and leaflets to communicate the procedure to students, users and the public are available across the College.

The timescales detailed in the procedure will be adhered to wherever possible. In certain circumstances it may not be possible to give a full response within the time indicated but the College will keep the complainant informed of progress made in investigating a complaint.