



north west

regional college

Derry/Londonderry • Limavady • Strabane

COMPLAINTS POLICY

AUGUST 2009

NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1 STATEMENT OF POLICY

- (i) The North West Regional College is committed to the provision of a high quality service for all of its customers. The Governing Body and the Senior Management of the College realise that sometimes we do not get things right or that sometimes our customers are not happy with the service that we provide.
- (ii) The College wishes to be made aware of any perceived defect in its services and would encourage students or other clients of the College to bring any complaint(s) to the attention of the appropriate staff. Complaints may have a direct impact on the efficiency of the College.
- (iii) The College is committed to ensure that complaints are fully considered and resolved in a timely, fair, consistent and equitable manner.
- (iv) The overall aim of the policy is to improve the quality of service by receiving and dealing with complaints, provide guidance to resolve complaints should they occur and to prevent recurrence. The College recognises that a complaint can be resolved at any stage in the process.
- (v) We will ensure that no client will in any way be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint.
- (vi) To allow us to fully and fairly investigate a complaint, we would expect the client to make us aware of the cause of the complaint within three months of the issue arising.
- (vii) The College is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This policy should be interpreted in a manner consistent with the aforementioned legislation.
- (viii) The North West Regional College will consider producing this policy in alternative formats on request e.g. Braille, Large Print, Computer Disk, Audio Cassette etc and/or alternative language.

2 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A COMPLAINT?

- (i) The College has defined a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the College affecting an individual, customer or group of customers”. A complaint is not an appeal against a properly reached decision, nor can the complaints procedure be used where another procedure exists, eg, Grievance Procedure, Harassment Procedure, Examinations, Student Charter, Non Compliance Complaints.

3 PRINCIPLES

- (i) This policy seeks to ensure:
 - (a) that any action taken is necessary, fair and consistent and that complainants are provided with adequate information concerning reasons for action and improvement sought (if appropriate);
 - (b) that the process to be followed by the appropriate personnel in dealing with a complaint is clear;
 - (c) that the levels of management which have the authority to take or implement action are specified.

4 MONITORING

- (i) The College will monitor and evaluate all complaints received and in the light of these may review and amend its policy and procedure.

5 METHODS OF COMPLAINT

- (i) **Informal**
 - (a) Where appropriate, a complaint should first be addressed informally to a relevant member of staff of the College to seek a resolution. See Appendix 1 for nominated personnel.
 - (b) If a complainant wishes to make an informal complaint, a record of the complaint will be forwarded to the Quality Manager.

Recording: It is vital that a record of any meeting is kept, should there be any subsequent and related action, which makes the content of the original enquiry significant.

Complainant confidentiality: This guarantee cannot be given, as all “confidential” discussions may become the subject of proceedings. However, where possible, the nominated officer should try to ensure confidentiality at all times. The person bringing the complaint should know that whatever is discussed under normal circumstances will be treated in strictest confidence. An exception to this is where information is divulged which suggests that either the person’s or other’s well-being are at risk.

(ii) **Formal**

If the issue has not been resolved to the client’s satisfaction, they can make a formal complaint. The complaint may be made in writing, by e-mail or by completing the attached Complaint Form (CP1) and should be addressed to the Quality Manager. The client must supply their name and address for all communication.

(iii) The client will receive an acknowledgement of the formal complaint within 5 working days of it being received by the Quality Manager.

(iv) The Quality Manager will forward the complaint to the relevant Manager for investigation. The Manager will report findings of the investigation in writing to the Quality Manager within 15 working days, or reasons given as to why an extended period is necessary. The Quality Manager will respond to the client within a further 5 working days and will indicate what action has been taken or is proposed in order to resolve the complaint or, if the complaint is not upheld, the reasons for that decision. Where an investigation extends beyond 20 working days, the Quality Manager will inform the client in writing of the expected completion date.

(v) In certain cases it may be necessary for the Quality Manager to make an independent investigation of the evidence relating to the complaint. This will be carried out in conjunction with an Assistant Director or another nominated Manager.

(vi) If the client is not satisfied with the outcome, they can appeal the decision by completing the attached Appeal Form (CP1) and forwarding it to the Quality Manager. The appeal must be lodged in

writing no later than 10 working days after the initial outcome has been received by the client.

- (vii) The client will receive an acknowledgement of the appeal within 5 working days of it being received by the Quality Manager.
- (viii) The Quality Manager in consultation with the Assistant Director (Client Services) appoints a Senior Manager (independent of the original investigation) to deal with the appeal.
- (ix) The Senior Manager will hear the appeal with the appellant accompanied by a work colleague if required or family member if the client is a minor. During the hearing the Quality Manager will be in attendance.
- (x) The Quality Manager will inform the client of the outcome of the appeal hearing within 20 working days from the date of acknowledgement. Where an appeal extends beyond 20 working days, the Quality Manager will inform the client in writing of the expected completion date. The decision of the appeal is final.
- (xi) In all cases the documentary evidence gathered and stored will remain confidential to those involved. Only general information and statistics will be made available for Quality and Equality monitoring purposes.
- (xii) The College will take the necessary action to minimise the risk of reoccurrence of the same or similar issues.
- (xiii) A summary of all complaints and associated equality data is forwarded periodically by the Quality Assurance Unit to the Assistant Director (Human Resources) and Senior Management Team for their information.

APPENDIX 1

NOMINATED PERSONNEL

Head of School – Academic Complaints

Assistant Director in Finance – Finance Complaints

Assistant Director in Human Resources – Staff and HR Related issues

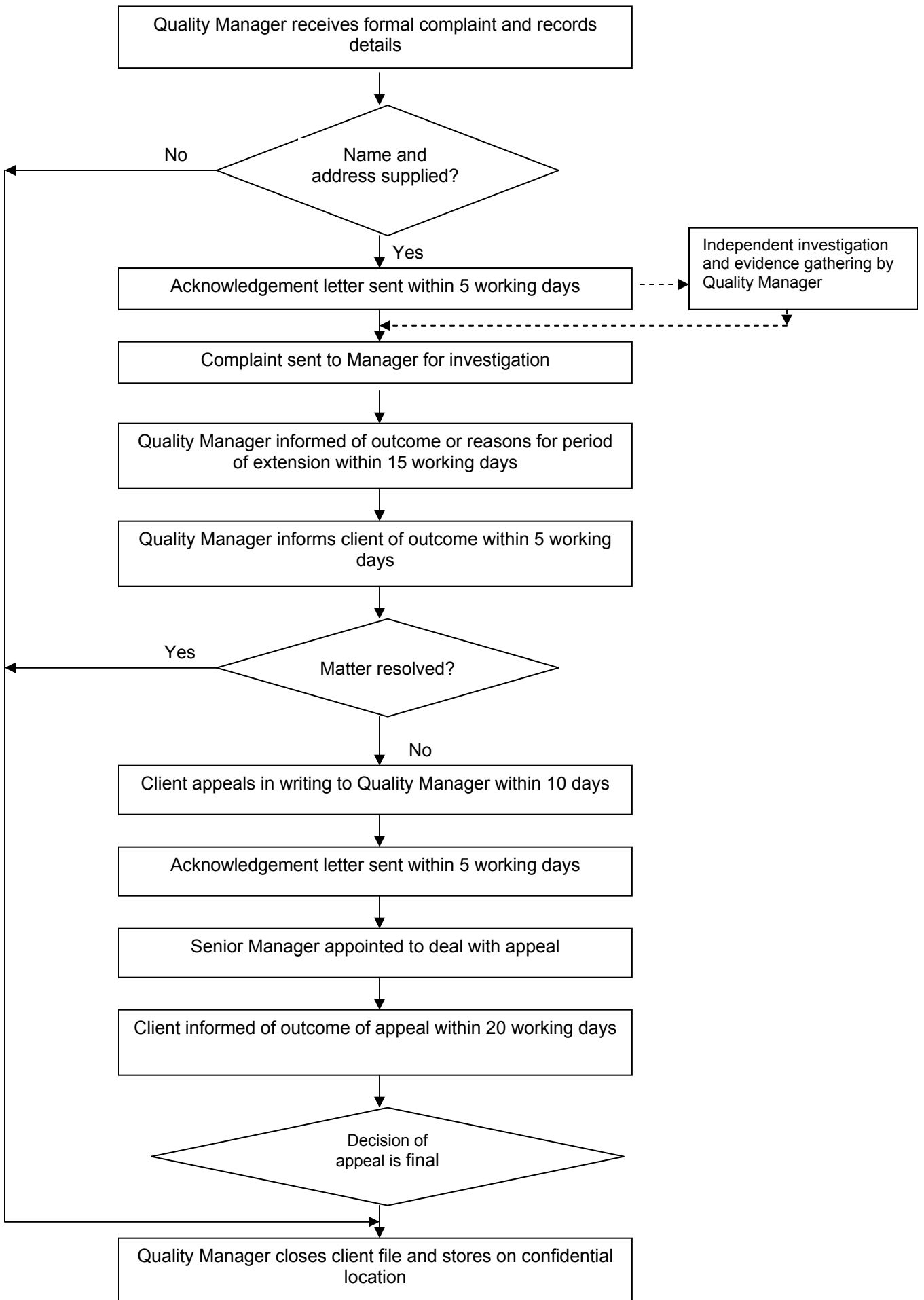
Assistant Director in College Development – Estates

Assistant Director in Client Services – Client Services related matters

Assistant Director in Curriculum – Academic matters

Any member of the Senior Management Team

FLOWCHART FOR CLIENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



COLLEGE GUIDELINES FOR NOMINATED / INVESTIGATING OFFICERS

GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWS

- Think about the interview environment. Arrange a place where you will not be interrupted or overheard.
- Explain that the interview is taking place under the College's Complaints Policy.
- Explain rights of representation or accompaniment.
- Introduce everyone and explain his/her role.
- Stress that the confidentiality of all parties is key to the investigation. Make clear that the individual should not discuss the alleged incident with others.
- Explain that you will be taking detailed notes. In a formal case you will require the interviewee to witness the statements.
- Explain that you are simply trying to establish the facts and stress the importance of the interviewee's contribution to this.
- Give precise details including the name of the complainant.
- Keep a level of professional detachment while remaining sensitive to the individual's needs and feelings.

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

- Encourage the complainant to write down details of the complaint, including what was said, time, date, etc. (In both formal and informal cases.)
- You must inform the complainant that in the case of a formal complaint, details of the complaint will be given to the alleged offender.
- Stress the need for confidentiality.
- Show 'empathy' not 'sympathy'.
- Outline the process to the complainant under the College policies and procedures.
- If the alleged complainant does not wish to be identified he/she cannot make any complaint.
- Do not judge the complainant.
- Do not comment on complaints or try to justify the behaviour.
- Do not criticise action taken by the complainant.
- Do not take over responsibility for the complainant.
- Do not adopt a position in relation to the complainant.
- Do not display your own feelings about the behaviour "that's unbelievable, he/she shouldn't be able to get away with that".
- Do not take control - let the complainant decide.
- Do not gossip or breach confidentiality.
- Ask specific questions relating to the complaint and ask what the complainant has to say about the complaint(s).
- Give the complainant opportunity to respond in full.
- Explain that you will be carrying out a thorough investigation and decide whether there is a case to answer.
- Explain that the complainant will be informed of the outcome of the investigation within a given time frame (outlined in the policy, ie, 20 working days).

NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE

FORM CP1 - FORMAL NOTICE OF COMPLAINT / APPEAL

Section 1: Complainant Details	Section 2: Area(s) of Complaint
Name:	Quality of Service, Resources and Facilities <input type="checkbox"/>
Address:	Quality of Teaching <input type="checkbox"/>
	Quality of Advice and Guidance <input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (please specify):
Telephone:	
Class (if applicable):	Has Stage 1 of the College Complaint Policy (Informal Complaint Resolution) been used in this case? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 3: Details of Complaint / Appeal (please be specific)	
<p>Signed: _____ Date: _____</p>	

When completed, please forward this form to the Quality Manager.