



COMPLAINTS GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURE

Guidance on how to make a complaint

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1 Introduction

1.1 This document is for the use of:

- Students and Apprentices (HE students please see below)
- Parents, guardians and/or carers on behalf of students under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults
- Clients using our facilities
- Visitors
- Suppliers
- Employers
- Local residents
- Members of the local community.

If you fall into one of these categories and wish to make a complaint, we use the term 'complainant' for you in the rest of this document.

1.2 Higher Education (HE) Students

HE Students should refer to the Higher Education Complaints Policy, which is available on Blackboard via the HE Student Info Hub, the University Centre Somerset (UCS) website or by emailing the HE Team at he@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk

1.3 Guiding Principles

University Centre Somerset College Group (UCS College Group) aims to provide you with the best possible services and to put you first. If you are dissatisfied about anything we have done, or if there is anything you feel we should have done but failed to do, please tell us. Unless you let us know we will not be able to put it right. The information gained as part of this process will be used to inform corrective action or continuous improvement.

UCS College Group seeks to minimise student complaints by ensuring students have opportunities to participate in a range of Learner Voice activities which enable students to be participants in shaping the service provided.

Because we care about you, we aim to investigate any complaint we receive effectively and fairly, ensuring the process is unbiased. We will do our best to put right any mistakes we find, and we will always tell you the result of our investigation. Please let us know as soon as possible so that we can make a difference to your experience.

Please be assured that no complainant will be discriminated against as a result of raising a complaint. An appropriate level of confidentiality will be preserved at all times without prejudice.

If a complaint is received specifically about the Principal or a senior post holder, as defined by the College, it will immediately be passed to the Clerk to the Governors who will refer it to the Chair of Governors to investigate and action.

1.4 What is not considered to be a complaint?

- Academic decisions, grades, marks, and End Point Assessment (EPA) results – these are covered by the Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure for Learners.

The College will not accept or investigate complaints that are, or are subsequently, found to be:

- Unfounded or trivial in nature
- Malicious, vexatious, or repetitive
- Made anonymously
- Designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- Demanding redress which lacks any serious purpose or value
- Relating to incidents which took place over 12 months previously and were not reported at the time.

UCS College Group has a responsibility to protect its staff against unacceptable behaviour and provide a working environment that is safe, respectful, and tolerant. Consequently, it is expected that complainants, their representatives, and staff members should act reasonably and fairly towards each other and treat the process with respect.

Behaviour that is unreasonable, aggressive or abusive, either verbal or written, by the complainant, or their representative, will not be tolerated and may result in the complainant's access to the procedure, or staff connected with the complaint, being limited or withdrawn. Any behaviour by a staff member not found to be appropriate will be dealt with under the relevant HR process.

1.5 Complainant's access to the complaints procedure being limited or withdrawn

In the event that this decision is taken we will provide details in writing, including the reasons why this decision has been taken. The complainant may appeal the decision to limit or withdraw access to the complaint procedure by writing to the Vice Principal TLA, Quality and Curriculum. Appeals must be made within 10 working days, and the complainant will receive a response within 20 working days providing notification of the outcome. The complainant will be notified of any delays in response times, this may be due to exceptional circumstances or allowing enough time for a full investigation to be carried out.

The appeal will be considered by the Vice Principal TLA, Quality and Curriculum, together with a second senior manager from a department not involved in the initial complaint.

The decision reached by the Vice Principal TLA, Curriculum and Quality, together with a second senior manager from a department not involved in the initial complaint, will be final.

For an appeal in this circumstance to be accepted the complainant will need to demonstrate one or more of the following grounds and provide supporting evidence:

- Evidence of procedural irregularities
- Evidence of bias
- The decision reached is one that no reasonable body (properly directing itself and taking into account all relevant factors), should have arrived at.

An appeal against the complainant's access to the procedure being withdrawn should be sent to complaints@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk in the first instance.

If there are allegations of a criminal offence, UCS College Group may refer the matter to the police and suspend their own proceedings until the outcome of any criminal proceedings are known.

1.6 Students

Before making a complaint, please consider whether you have fulfilled your responsibilities as a student (see the Student Charter and Code of Conduct), and if you would like an initial conversation with a manager to see whether we can solve your issue quickly and easily.

2. Complaint Procedure Guidance

When you are following this procedure, you can ask someone to give you support. You can contact the Student Experience Department or Reception where the staff will be able to offer advice and support as required.

Keep a note of discussions you have at each stage, the dates on which they take place and keep copies of relevant documents.

2.1 Verbal complaint

It is always best to resolve and conclude matters as quickly as possible and UCS College Group staff are keen to respond by discussing the complaint with a view to finding an early resolution. Complainants are encouraged to resolve any issues verbally with the relevant member of staff.

If the complainant is a student or the parent, guardian and/or carer of either a student under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult, please discuss the matter with one of the following:

- The person directly involved
- The student's Lecturer, Personal Tutor or Assessor
- The student's Course Leader
- The Deputy Head of Department with responsibility for the service concerned
- The Assistant Principal with responsibility for the service concerned.

If the complainant is an employer, please discuss the matter with one of the following:

- The student's/apprentice's Learning Coach
- The student's/apprentice's Assessor
- The student's/apprentice's Course Leader or Team Leader
- The student's/apprentice's Deputy Head of Department
- The Head of Department with responsibility for the service concerned.

For all other complainants please discuss the matter with one of the following:

- The person directly involved
- The Assistant Principal with responsibility for the service concerned.

2.2 Written complaint

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your verbal complaint you can proceed to a written complaint.

In your written communication outlining your complaint please clearly state the details of your complaint, the details of any previous discussions you have had with members of staff and what actions you would like the College to take to resolve the situation.

You can contact the College in one of the following ways:

- By email to complaints@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk
- By filling out the complaints form on the College website
- By filling out a form available from Reception or Student Services.

All written complaints will be forwarded to The Complaints Administrator (CA).

3. College Procedure

- 3.1** The CA will acknowledge a complaint within 3 working days of receipt.
- 3.2** The CA will forward the complaint to the relevant senior manager who will appoint an Investigating Officer to investigate your concerns and provide you with a response within 20 working days of receipt of your complaint.
- 3.3** If the investigation will take longer than 20 working days the CA will inform you of the revised response date. This may occur in complex cases, during College holiday periods or exceptional circumstances.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint you can refer to the review guidance below.

4. Review Procedure Guidance

- 4.1** If your written complaint has not been resolved in a way that is satisfactory to you, you can request your complaint be reviewed by writing to the Director/ Principal of the relevant area, clearly stating the grounds for your review request.
- 4.2** A review request needs to be submitted within 10 working days of receipt of the initial outcome of your complaint. A review will only be considered on the following grounds:
 - Information is now available which was not originally available to the complainant or the Investigating Officer at the time of the original written complaint
 - The complainant feels that a fair and just decision has not been reached by the Investigating Officer.

The College reserves the right not to accept or consider appeals if the investigation of the complaint has found full compliance with College policies and procedures. In this case there will not be grounds for an appeal.

You should email Complaints via complaints@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk or directly in writing to Complaints, UCS College Group, Bath Road, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 4PZ.

Your review request will then be assigned to another senior manager who has not previously been involved in the complaint. The allocated investigating officer will review all previous and new evidence and will instigate a further investigation if required.

You can expect a written reply within 20 working days of receipt of your review request which will provide the outcome decision in relation to the review. This will be the final outcome, no further correspondence will be

entered into, and the review response letter will conclude the College complaints procedure.

4.3 UCS College Group hope that once all stages of the complaint process have been exhausted, we will have satisfactorily resolved any complaints. On some occasions this may not be the case and if the complainant is still not satisfied with the resolution offered, they may correspond with an external agency, a government funding agency or an awarding organisation.

In some cases, complainants may wish to escalate their complaint and alert external agencies to their concerns in parallel with the College review procedure, but in general, external agencies would look to the College to complete internal processes and seek a satisfactory resolution for the issue in the first instance.

OFSTED Responsible for inspecting Further Education	www.ofsted.gov.uk
Department for Education Responsible for education funding	Department for Education - GOV.UK

5. Complaints Review

UCS College Group take complaints seriously and are committed to continuous improvement, therefore the Board of Governors review complaints on a termly basis. College procedures, practices and outcomes are reviewed and adjusted in order to make improvements and mitigate the likelihood of receiving similar complaints in the future.