



Complaints and Allegations

Policy and Procedure

Policy statement

The College is always looking to improve our service to students, staff and the community and regards feedback, including complaints, on any aspect of our performance as helpful for improvement.

All students, parents, and other users of the College service are entitled to raise concerns, suggestions and complaints and it is in the College's best interest that they do so. The College will treat all concerns seriously and sensitively. The level of the College's response will depend on the nature of the complaint or allegation.

It is noted that there are separate grievance procedures for staff.

Complaint on Behalf of Others

The College recognises that parents, for example, may want to raise concerns about an aspect of College that is affecting their son or daughter. Or, for example, a student may make an allegation about the way another student is being treated.

Normally, the College cannot take forward a complaint or allegation without involving the student, or if the student him or herself does not wish the complaint to be taken forward. The normal process will be that the student(s) affected by the matter raised will be approached, as a first step of determining how to proceed. However, in some cases, the College can respond sensitively without involving the student, if it is in the best interest of the student to do so.

If an allegation is made by a third party which raises safeguarding concerns, then the matter will be dealt with promptly as set out by the College's Child Protection policy and procedures.

Allegations of abuse by a member of staff

It is essential that any allegation of abuse made against a member of staff is dealt with fairly, quickly and consistently in a way that provides effective protection for the student and at the same time supports the individual who is subject to the allegation. If your complaint involves an allegation of abuse against a member of staff or volunteer, then the complaint will be dealt with under the procedures outlined in the College's Child Protection Policy & Procedures".

Staff who are the subject of complaint

As part of any fair process, at some stage of the procedure, a member of staff who is the subject of a complaint will be made aware of the complaint, and be able to respond to it. The exception to this may be where a trivial or mischievous complaint is made which is readily resolved, and the judgement of a senior manager is that to pass on details of the complaint to the member of staff would give the matter unwarranted significance, or cause unnecessary alarm.

A serious complaint may, under certain circumstances, lead to disciplinary action against a member of staff. In which case the provisions of the Disciplinary Policy and procedures will govern the response of the College in dealing with the staff member.

INFORMAL AND FORMAL COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

Informal Resolution

Our aim is to treat concerns seriously and sensitively, but to resolve them as simply and quickly as possible. Our emphasis is, therefore, on informal resolution. Many complaints can easily be resolved at this stage without the need to make a formal complaint (see below). Unless it is requested the complaint is dealt with formally or the allegation is of a serious nature then it will be assumed it is to be dealt with informally. In the first instance the complaint should be raised informally with the member(s) of staff concerned, or, if this is not helpful or appropriate, with the relevant line manager (Head of Department or support team manager) or a senior manager at the College (see below).

Guidance is also given in the Student Handbook and the Parents' Guide on how to proceed informally if there are concerns.

Referral to Senior Manager

In some cases, as part of the informal process of resolving a concern or complaint, a senior manager may be involved to oversee the process, or provide mediation. A student, parent, or other complainant can specifically request that the complaint or concern be referred to a senior manager. This can be done by directly contacting a member of the College Management Team, or by contacting Reception or the Student Services desk who will enable the referral to be made.

Formal Complaint to the Principal

If the complaint is of a serious nature or if having followed the guidance in the Student Handbook and / or Parents' Guide, you are still not satisfied with the steps taken to resolve the problem you may decide to make a formal complaint to the Principal. A formal complaint must be in writing, explain the nature of the complaint and should state that it is formal.

The Principal will:

- acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days
- assign a member (which may be the Principal) of the senior management team to investigate and respond to the complaint
- the senior manager will invite you to meet in College or to discuss the matter by telephone (whichever you prefer)
- the outcome of the investigation and any actions arising will, in any case, be agreed with the Principal
- a full written response will be sent to you within 10 days of the meeting / conversation.

Appeal to the Governing Body

If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome or with the way the complaint has been dealt with, you can ask for the matter to be reviewed by a Complaints Committee of the Corporation (i.e. the Governing Body). Letters should be addressed to the College for the attention of the Chairman of the Corporation.

The Chairman will:

- acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days

- establish whether all internal College procedures have been properly followed and exhausted
- determine whether a Complaints Committee is appropriate, if not, will write to the complainant
- if determined that a Complaints Committee is appropriate, will form one to investigate the matter
- invite you to a hearing within 30 working days of the letter of complaint
- send a written response within 5 working days of the hearing.

There are no further appeals within the College.

Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

It is the role of the ESFA to consider complaints from you although they would not normally investigate unless:

- The College's procedures, including appeal, have been exhausted
- The ESFA believe the College is not dealing, or is not capable of dealing with the complaint appropriately or effectively; e.g. in the case of fraud.

Education & Skills Funding Agency Darlington
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See also the web-page: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure#complain-about-a-post-16-training-provider-college-or-employer-we-fund>