

Policy description:

Craven College values the views of all its customers and aims to manage complaints in a way that is sensitive to the needs of both individuals and groups. This policy sets out how the College will provide a courteous, professional and efficient service to students, clients and other individuals and organisations with whom it works including those occasions when something goes wrong. It is anticipated that most complaints will be dealt with through informal channels but if a customer feels that it is necessary to pursue a complaint formally, they can be assured that it will be treated seriously and that the College will deal with any complaint promptly and fairly.

Supporting documentation:

- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Craven College – *How to make a Complaint* leaflet and form
- FE Assessment Appeals Procedure
- HE Appeals Policy and Procedure

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Craven College values the views of all its customers and aims to manage complaints in a way that is sensitive to the needs of both individuals and groups. This policy sets out how the College will provide a courteous, professional and efficient service to students, clients and other individuals and organisations with whom it works including those occasions when something goes wrong. It is anticipated that most complaints will be dealt with through informal channels but if a customer feels that it is necessary to pursue a complaint formally, they can be assured that it will be treated seriously and that the College will deal with any complaint promptly and fairly.

The College will use feedback received through informal and formal complaints to help improve the quality of service it provides within the resources available.

This policy will be published on the College intranet, the Student VLE and the College website. Leaflets outlining how to make a complaint incorporating a standard College Complaints Form will be published on the Student VLE and the College website and will also be available at College Receptions and in Student Services.

2.0 Context

2.1 Informal Complaints

An informal complaint is an issue which a customer wants to raise with the College / member of College staff without resorting to the formal complaints process. The issue is usually quick and straightforward to resolve and is unlikely to require in-depth investigation.

2.2 Formal Complaints

A formal complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service received from a teaching or support department, or about actions or lack of action taken by the College or its staff.

2.3 Complaints in general

The College aims to balance the rights of the complainant with the rights of any person about whom a complaint is made, treating all parties with fairness and dignity. A complainant should not suffer any reprisals for making a complaint in good faith and any evidence of recrimination should be brought to the immediate attention of the Vice Principal – Curriculum and Quality. If, however, a complaint from a student which is not upheld is found to have been made maliciously, the student may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

2.4 Timescales for making a complaint

Complaints should be made as soon as possible following the event, action or issue causing dissatisfaction. Complaints from students no longer attending College must be made within 3 months of their course completion date.

2.5 Expectations

The College will:

- Listen and take note of the complaint and respond within a stated period of time
- Deal with the complaint reasonably and sensitively
- Take follow up action where appropriate
- Welcome issues being brought to its attention to prevent a possible recurrence of the problem
- Provide feedback to complainants

The complainant will be expected to:

- Explain the problem clearly and fully, including any action taken to date
- Allow the College reasonable time to deal with the matter
- Recognise that some circumstances may be beyond the College's control

3.0 THE POLICY

3.1 Informal Complaints

- 3.1.1** In the first instance, individuals wishing to complain should discuss the problem with the staff member directly involved, or the person with responsibility for the area where the issue has occurred, at a mutually convenient time, and appropriate action should be agreed.
- 3.1.2** In academic matters the complaint will normally be dealt with by the tutor, HE Sector Tutor, Subject Sector Leader or referred to the Head of School.
- 3.1.3** If the matter is not raised directly with the Head of School (HoS) or Departmental Manager, then they should be informed by the member/s of staff involved. For matters regarding HE, the Dean of HE should also be informed.
- 3.1.4** In other matters, the manager of the service area involved will normally handle the complaint.
- 3.1.5** A response should be made within a maximum of 10 working days but preferably within a timescale to ensure the matter is resolved as quickly as possible.
- 3.1.6** The person receiving the complaint should obtain the contact details of the person making the complaint, make notes on its nature, how it was dealt with and the outcome, and pass this information to the HoS or Departmental Manager who should enter these details in the Complaints Log on the Staff Intranet, uploading all associated paperwork, letters, and emails. Any notes / paperwork should be destroyed (once uploaded electronically) or, if retained, kept securely and confidentially.
- 3.1.7** If there is no satisfactory outcome or agreed action a formal complaint can be made.

3.2 Formal Complaints

- 3.2.1** Formal complaints may be made if the complainant feels that an informal complaint has not been satisfactorily dealt with, if the issue is of a serious nature or if the complainant wishes to progress straight to the formal complaint stage.
- 3.2.2** Formal complaints may be made verbally (face to face or telephone conversation), in writing by letter or email or through completion of a standard College Complaints Form. In the case of verbal complaints, the member of staff receiving the complaint should record the details using the standard College Complaints Form. Complaints in writing may be handed to any member of College staff.
- 3.2.3** Formal complaints received by members of staff should be forwarded promptly to the Head of Quality for attention and further investigation.
- 3.2.4** An acknowledgement will be made within 3 working days of the complaint being received by the College with, where possible, a clear indication of when the complainant can expect to hear from the College again.
- 3.2.5** The Head of Quality will investigate the matter with relevant members of staff and students, either directly or through a nominated person, and for HE students in consultation with partner universities as appropriate in conjunction with the Dean of HE.

- 3.2.6 A reply will be made in writing within 10 working days from receipt of the original complaint. If the matter is particularly serious or complicated it may take longer to resolve the issue, but information on progress will be provided to the complainant, keeping any university informed as relevant.
- 3.2.7 The Head of Quality will enter the details of the complaint in the Complaints Log on the Staff Intranet and upload any associated paperwork. Any notes / paperwork should be destroyed (once uploaded electronically) or, if retained, kept securely and confidentially.
- 3.2.8 If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the outcome of the investigation, they may appeal against the decision by contacting the College's Vice Principal – Curriculum and Quality in writing (by letter or email) within 10 working days of receiving notification of the outcome of the initial complaint.
- 3.2.9 The Vice Principal – Curriculum and Quality will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 3 working days of receiving it.
- 3.2.10 The Vice Principal – Curriculum and Quality will confirm the outcome of the appeal in writing to the complainant within 10 working days of receiving the appeal.
- 3.2.11 If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the outcome of the appeal, they may appeal directly to the Principal in writing (by letter or email) within 10 working days of receiving notification of the outcome of the appeal.
- 3.2.12 The Principal will confirm the outcome of the further appeal in writing to the complainant within 10 working days of receiving the appeal.

3.3 College Accountability

- 3.3.1 All College staff have a responsibility for receiving complaints, treating them seriously and dealing with them as set out in this policy.
- 3.3.2 All staff have a responsibility to ensure information relating to complaints is treated in the strictest confidence.
- 3.3.3 The Head of Quality is responsible for investigating, tracking, recording and reporting on the outcomes of formal complaints.
- 3.3.4 Members of the Senior Management Team (SMT), Heads of School and Department Managers have a responsibility for the resolving of complaints and for leading or contributing to an investigation into a complaint when this is considered appropriate.
- 3.3.5 The College Principal is responsible for resolving complaints that remain unresolved following the appeals stages of the process.
- 3.3.6 The Governing Board is responsible for ensuring that the Complaints Policy operates effectively and may become directly involved if the complaint is against the Principal, the Director of Governance, another Senior Post Holder or member/s of the governing body.

3.4 Complaints Against the Principal, Board of Governors, a member of the Board or the Director of Governance

- 3.4.1 Complaints against the Principal should be addressed to the Chair of Corporation, c/o the Director of Governance.

3.4.2 For complaints against the Board of Governors, a member of the Board or the Director of Governance, refer to the Complaints against the Board of Governors Policy which is published on the Staff Intranet, the Student VLE and the College website.

3.5 Confidentiality

If the complainant wishes specific information within a complaint to be kept confidential, this should be made clear to the person to whom the complaint is addressed. Complainants should understand that in some circumstances it may be difficult for requests for confidentiality to be respected, for example where the complaint relates to a possible criminal offence or potential gross misconduct. Additionally, in some circumstances a request for confidentiality might make it difficult for the College to investigate or resolve a complaint.

3.6 Anonymous Complaints

On occasion it might be difficult for someone to make a complaint eg if they feel threatened or feel that it might result in some form of reprisal. The College aims to deal with all complaints in strict confidence and it is the individual's right to complain if they are dissatisfied with the standard of service received. Anonymous complaints will be investigated but if the College is not provided with the complainants contact details we will not be able to request additional information or provide feedback on the outcome.

3.7 Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

It may be that a complaint relates to the possible physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect or radicalisation of someone under the age of 18 or someone who is deemed a vulnerable adult. In such circumstances, the College has a legal obligation to report cases of suspected abuse or cases of someone being at risk of abuse. Complaints or disclosures of this nature may not remain confidential as those at risk will require protection.

Please contact Student Support Services in the first instance if you wish to discuss this type of incident.

3.8 Aggressive or Abusive Complaints

The College will not tolerate aggressive behaviour, bad language, racist, sexist or any discriminatory comments. The Head of Quality will inform aggressive complainants that their language or behaviour is considered to be unacceptable.

3.9 Appeals Against Assessment Decisions

Information on appealing against Further Education (FE) assessment decisions can be found in the College's FE Assessments Appeals Procedure which is published on the College VLE and website. HE Students may not appeal against their mark/s (academic judgement) but may appeal against the decision of the Board of Examiners. See the College's HE Appeals Policy.

3.10 Reporting

The Head of Quality will produce an anonymised report, detailing the number and nature of complaints for the year to date, to SMT monthly during term time. The Head of Quality will produce an anonymised annual report to the Quality and Standards Committee giving details of complaints received in the previous year broken down by age, ethnicity, gender and disability and including a summary of the actions taken as a result of complaints received.

3.11 Equality statement

If requested the College will endeavour to provide the contents of this policy in other formats and languages. If a potential complainant requires this type of support, they should contact Student Support Services in the first instance.

3.12 Taking A Complaint Further

- 3.12.1** If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the College's response following the appeals process, they may refer their complaint to external agency/ies. This does not apply where a complaint is the subject of legal proceedings or relates to the quality of service provided by external organisations such as an examination board. Only after all College procedures have been exhausted should the complaint be referred by the complainant to the Funding Body or relevant Government Agency.
- 3.12.2** If a complaint against the College remains unresolved, the complainant may refer the complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The College is able to provide further information about this process. Complaints should be sent in writing to the Complaints Team, Education and Skills Funding Agency, Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT or by email to complaints.ESFA@education.gov.uk
- 3.12.3** Higher Education: If the complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the student they may apply for a review of their case to the relevant University by contacting the relevant Assistant Registrar. If, after consideration of the case by the partner University the complainant continues to be dissatisfied, they can make a formal complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE). For more information go to: <http://www.oiahe.org.uk>

FLOWCHART FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

