



Complaints and Compliments Policy

SECTOR POLICY

Version 4

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Approved By:	Strategic Leadership Team
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Corporate Development

Belfast Metropolitan College
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Policy Compliance details:-

Compliance with Equality Legislation.

PLEASE NOTE: Policies must be equality screened before being submitted to SLT and Trade Unions:-

Equality Screening Date:	13/06/2016
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Document History

Version Number	Author	Amendments/Updates	Date
1.0	Corporate Development	<p>Updated Learner Success details throughout.</p> <p>1.1 Included – (the “College”).</p> <p>3.1 Deleted – and Comments (from the title)</p> <p>3.2 Included – in the first instance and it is not appropriate to raise the issue/s informally.</p> <p>3.3 Deleted- if you are under 18. Included- If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone over the age of 13, consent from the individual or proof of power may be required.</p> <p>5.1 Deleted- Telephone communications section. Changed- Title from Customer Communications to Record of Communications.</p> <p>Appendix 1 and 2 included section on Privacy Notice. Appendix 3- Updated Complaint Process flowchart.</p>	02/01/2019
2.0	Corporate Development	<p>Change of job title from Corporate Compliance Officer to Data Protection and Complaints Officer.</p> <p>Change in references from GDPR to UK GDPR</p> <p>Accessibility (formatting) changes made throughout including the addition of hyperlinks.</p>	29 April 2022
3.0	Corporate Development	<p>Updated in light of audit recommendations to add reference to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Complaints Procedures (Section 3.3. page 8 footnote) • Equality Scheme (Section 2.4) • Receipt and verification of oral/verbal complaints and the circumstances an oral/verbal complaint is acceptable (Section 3.3 (new paragraph)) 	15/08/22
4.0	Corporate Development	<p>Section 2.4 – Link to HE student handbook included.</p> <p>Section 3.3 – Specific mailbox for compliments@belfastmet.ac.uk is referenced.</p> <p>Section 4.1 - Data Protection and Complaints Officer changed to Data Protection and Complaints Executive.</p> <p>Section 2.0 - Added Data Protection section</p> <p><i>Section 3.2 - Reference to Northern Ireland Audit Office Guide added</i></p> <p><i>Section to 3.5 updated link to academic appeals and Equality Scheme.</i></p>	08/05/2024

		<p>Section 6.1 added wording to grounds for appeal.</p> <p>Section 5.3 updated Reference to Higher Education (HE) students may also have the right, in certain circumstances, to raise a complaint with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).</p> <p>Section 7.1 - Updated in light of audit recommendations to add reference to <i>escalating complaints to The Open University where applicable</i>.</p> <p><i>Appendix 1 and 2 – updated wording</i></p>	
5.0	Corporate Development	Section 3.3 - Updated in light of audit recommendations to add reference to awarding body, NEBDN. Removed typo from footnote on page 8.	25/11/2024

Table setting out changes to the policy

Distribution

This document has been distributed to:

Name	Date (where applicable)
Trade Union	17 May 2022
Executive Leadership Team	08/08/2022
Strategic Leadership Team	13 January 2020; 16 August 2022
ARAC Committee	N/A
Governing Body	N/A
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Table setting out who approved the policy and when.

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1.0 Policy Statement

- 1.1 Belfast Metropolitan College (the “College”) is committed to providing the highest quality of service to all our customers. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of service provided by the College or College staff, they have the right to complain.
- 1.2 A complaint may be defined as ‘*A statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.*’ www.oxforddictionaries.com.
- 1.3 The raising of complaints and the provision of feedback provides the College with an opportunity to improve its services. The College monitors complaints and the outcomes in order to improve the quality of our provision. This policy advises customers of the College's commitment to ensuring that any issues or problems are resolved quickly and as close to the source as possible, to the satisfaction of all concerned. Please refer to **Appendix 3** in relation to the complaints process.

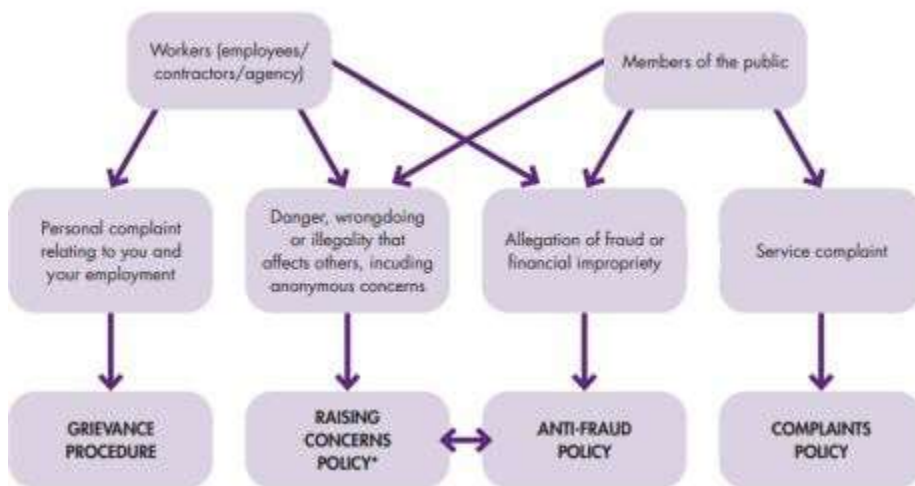
2.0 Data Protection

2.1 Information gathered in the management of complaint and compliments will be processed within the provisions of current Data Protection legislation. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a ‘lawful basis’ to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a public task or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller, e.g., Public Authorities are accountable to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

2.2 The customer’s information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating the complaint (this may include the member of staff who is the subject of the complaint or compliment). The customer’s information may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, or legal professionals, where there is a lawful basis to do so. Further information on data protection and the individual’s rights are available on our [website](#).

3.0 Scope

- 3.1 For the purposes of this policy, a customer may be a student, external customer, member of the public or third-party stakeholder.
- 3.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Audit Office Guide ‘Raising Concerns - A good practice guide for the Northern Ireland public sector’. See diagram below and link to full document - NIAO Good Practice Guide (niauditoffice.gov.uk)



3.3 The College will comply with the Standards for Complaint Handling in the Public Service agreed by the Permanent Secretaries Group, ensuring that:

- There are clear lines of accountability for the handling and consideration of complaints within the College;
- Complainants have open and easy access to the College’s complaints policy and information required to enable them to complain about any aspect of service;
- Complaints are dealt with through an efficient and effective process;
- All investigations are conducted promptly, thoroughly, openly, honestly and objectively;
- Complaints are responded to as promptly as possible and all issues raised are addressed;
- The College promotes a culture of learning from complaints so that, where necessary, service, processes and practices can be improved; and
- The organisation monitors the effectiveness of its complaint handling and responsiveness.

3.4 In addition, the College will:

- Ensure that all positive comments are passed on to the relevant staff members;
- Process all complaints in a fair, consistent and unbiased manner;
- Endeavour to communicate with the customer within agreed timeframes throughout the process;
- Ensure no customer is disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint;
- Promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998);
- Respect confidentiality and protect customers’ data in line with legislation; and
- Monitor and review complaints and compliments for quality assurance and equality monitoring purposes.

3.5 Exemptions to this policy include:

- Anonymous complaints, which will not usually be investigated, but will be recorded;

- Matters where another policy or procedure applies; for example academic appeals¹ or the [College Equality Scheme](#)²;
- The right of the College not to investigate unreasonable or vexatious complaints; and
- Staff complaints, which fall under separate employment policies and procedures.

3.0 Categories of Customer Feedback

3.1 Compliments

If a customer feels that the College has exceeded the expected standard of service or wishes to leave a compliment or positive comment, they can either:

- Complete a 'Compliments Form' (**Appendix 2**). Forms may be downloaded from the College website or are available at reception;
- Complete an online compliments form here: [Corporate Information/Complaints and Compliments section of the website](#);
- Email the College on compliments@belfastmet.ac.uk ; and/ or
- Advise a member of staff in person of the positive experience.

3.2 Informal Complaint

If there is an occasion where a customer is not satisfied with the service we provide; they have a right to complain.

We would encourage customers to seek to resolve any issues informally with the relevant member of staff in the first instance e.g. face-to-face discussion.

Where a resolution cannot be found or it is not appropriate to raise the issue/s informally, the customer may submit a formal complaint in writing.

3.3 Formal Complaint

If a customer wishes to raise a formal complaint, they can either:

- Complete a hard copy Complaints Form (**Appendix 1**). Forms are downloadable from the College website or available at reception;
- Email the College at complaints@belfastmet.ac.uk ;
- Complete an [online complaints form](#), also available on the Corporate Information/Complaints and Compliments section of the College's website;
- If a customer indicates orally that they would like to make a formal complaint, they will be asked to confirm details of their complaint in writing.

If the complaint relates to an academic matter, students have the right to contact and engage with the relevant Awarding Body directly, however Awarding Organisations³ will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Complaints Policy.

¹ Please refer to our Access [Programmes and Higher Education Academic Appeals](#) guidance on our website for more information.

² Please refer to the [College's Equality Scheme](#).

³ Please note that Awarding Body, NEBDN, are unable to get involved in any monetary disputes between the College and the Learner.

Higher Education (HE) students may also have the right, in certain circumstances, to raise a complaint with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). Contact details for the CMA are as below:

Competition and Markets Authority

Victoria House

Southampton Row

London

WC1B 4AD

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority>

Verbal/ Oral Complaints

Where possible please encourage all complainants to submit their complaint online. However, to ensure this policy is accessible to all, if it is not possible for the complainant to submit their complaint online then please take a written account.

Where a complaint is made orally/ verbally, the complaint shall be documented by the staff member, recorded and a copy of the written record given to the complainant via email or letter. When giving the written record to the complainant, please ensure you ask them to confirm they are satisfied with your written account before proceeding with the investigation.

Those who would like to make a complaint on behalf of someone else, please ensure they provide you with their child's/carer's written consent.

Staff members who receive verbal positive comments or compliments from customers should ensure these are passed on to compliments@belfastmet.ac.uk for recording. All compliments received will be recorded and retained centrally, in line with the FE Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule.

If assistance is required with the completion of or the submission of a complaint, customers may contact the Head of Learner Success, Room TQ2-020, email: dmcdowell@belfastmet.ac.uk.

Complaints should be submitted to the College no later than three months from the date of the issue arising. In exceptional circumstances, the College may exercise discretion with this timescale.

Complaints may be submitted on behalf of someone else, for example a vulnerable adult. If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone over the age of 13, consent from the individual or proof of power of authority may be required.

All formal complaints will be forwarded to the relevant Responsible Owner³ for an open and objective investigation. The investigation will be based on the information provided by the complainant at the time of making their initial complaint, together with any supplementary evidence obtained through the investigation. Upon completion of the investigation, a written response will be issued to the complainant. For the purposes of this Policy, the Responsible Owner is the individual appointed to investigate the complaint.

³ Responsible owners are defined within the Complaints and Compliments Procedure on the staff intranet.

The College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed below (**Table 1**).

Complaint Timeframes

Table 1

Communication	Response Time
Complaint acknowledgement letter/email to customer	5 working days* from receipt of complaint
Letter/email issued to complainant if further information required to progress complaint	Clarification information to be returned within 10 working days of receipt
Complaint response letter/email to customer	20 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email issued

Table setting out the complaints timeframes

**Working days are those days on which the College is open. Weekends, statutory days, Bank Holidays and other College closures are classed as 'non-working' days. Complaints specific to course admissions will be acknowledged within 2 working days from receipt of complaint.*

Complaints specific to course admissions will be responded to within 5 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email is issued.

If, for reasons beyond the College's control the investigation and outcome exceeds or is likely to exceed the timeframes set out in **Table 1**, the customer will be notified in writing as soon as practicably possible.

4.0 Appeals

4.1 If a customer is dissatisfied with the College response to their complaint, they have the right to appeal.

Appeals should be submitted in writing, with full details of the grounds for appeal, to the **Data Protection and Complaints Executive, Integrated Shared Services Centre, 398 Springfield Road, Belfast, BT12 7DU**⁴ or via **Email address complaints@belfastmet.ac.uk**.

4.2 The grounds for appeal should relate only to the information provided by the complainant at the time of making the initial complaint or the supplementary evidence obtained through the investigation. The individual(s) appointed to consider the appeal will only review the information contained within the scope of the original complaint and will not consider any additional or new information which may be introduced by the appellant at this stage of the process.

4.2 Following receipt of an appeal the College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed below (**Table 2**).

Appeal Timeframes

Table 2

Communication	Response Time
Complainant submits appeal to the College	10 working days from date customer receives complaint response
Appeal acknowledgement letter/email to customer	5 working days from receipt of appeal from customer

⁴ In the event a complaint made is about the Principal and Chief Executive, the Chair of the Audit Committee will appoint a suitable person to investigate and report. Any subsequent appeal will be addressed by the Governing Body.

Appeal response letter/email to customer	20 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email issued
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Table setting out the appeal timeframes

- 4.3 Appeals will be considered by an individual(s) with no previous connection to the original complaint. The individual(s) appointed to consider the appeal request will depend on the nature of the complaint and appeal lodged.
- 4.4 If, for reasons beyond the Colleges control the investigation and outcome exceeds the timeframe or is likely to exceed the timeframe, the customer will be notified in writing as soon as practically possible.

5.0 Record of Communications

- 5.1 Complaint meetings and phone calls are confidential. If a meeting is required to resolve the issue, minutes will be taken and made available upon request to those in attendance. If the complainant identifies any inaccuracies, the minutes will be reviewed, and where an amendment is agreed a revised minute will be issued.
- 5.2 College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy, the College does not consent to conversations being recorded, unless express consent has been obtained.

6.0 If a Customer remains dissatisfied

- 6.1 It is hoped the College will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints procedure. If however a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the right to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman's (NIPSO), in his/her role as Commissioner for Complaints⁵.
- 6.2 The customer can complain to NIPSO; however, NIPSO will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Complaints and Compliments Policy, and where it is received within six months of completing the College's complaints process. Contact details for NIPSO are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
 Progressive House
 33 Wellington Place
 Belfast
 BT1 6HN

www.nipso.org.uk

7.0 Monitoring Complaints and Compliments

- 7.1 The College welcomes and values all feedback from customers. The College analyses feedback and areas of complaint in order to improve services. All complaints will be dealt with sensitively, and in all cases the documentary evidence gathered and stored remains confidential to those involved. Statistical information will be made available for quality and equality monitoring purposes.

8.0 Communication

- 8.1 This Policy is available at www.belfastmet.ac.uk, under 'policies and procedures' section of the [Public](#)

⁵ Open University validated programme students can escalate complaints to The Open University as the Awarding Body prior to being referred to NIPSO. See link for further details - Complaints and appeals | Validation Partnerships (open.ac.uk)

[Documents website page](#) and is accessible in house via the [policy section of the staff intranet](#). It can also be made available, upon request, in alternative formats including large print, braille, audio, and in minority languages.

9.0 Review

- 9.1 This Policy will be reviewed (and amended if necessary) at least annually or sooner if required to reflect changes in legislation or circumstances.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS FORM

If you require assistance with making a complaint, please contact the Head of Learner Success, Room TQ2-020, email: dmcdowell@belfastmet.ac.uk

Email completed form to complaints@belfastmet.ac.uk.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, consistent with a full investigation of the issue.

If you are submitting a complaint on behalf of someone else, please provide their name/contact details in Section 1B. We may contact the individual for permission to discuss the issue with you.

SECTION 1A – Complainant Details

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms	Other:
Name:		
Contact Address:		
Tel Number:		
Email:		
Student ID (if applicable)		
Course Title (if applicable)		

Complainant details

Status: Please tick below as appropriate:-

FE/WBL Student	HE Student	Parent or Guardian	Staff	Member of the Public	Employer	Organisation
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Complaint category section

Details of Complaint: Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved if known. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.

Details of Compliment Section

SECTION 1B – Details of person on whose behalf you are submitting complaint, if different to above

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms	Other:
Name:		

Contact Address:	
Tel Number:	
Email:	
Student ID (if applicable)	
Do you have their consent to raise this matter Y/N	

Complaint details

Status: Please tick below as appropriate:-

Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent or Guardian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	Member of the Public	<input type="checkbox"/>	Employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Complaint category section

SECTION 2

<p>Details of Complaint: Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.</p>
<p>Have you attempted to resolve this issue informally? Yes / No If Yes, please summarise any action taken to resolve your issue/s to date.</p>

Details of complaint section

Section 3

<p>What do you see as a suitable remedy to address the issue or matter raised?</p>

This form should be returned:

By post to: Data Protection and Complaints Executive, Integrated Shared Services Centre, 398 Springfield Road, Belfast, BT12 7DU

By e-mail to: complaints@belfastmet.ac.uk

NB: You can post your complaint externally, or leave it at your nearest Campus Reception.

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and used for the purpose of investigating your complaint. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a **public task** or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller e.g. Public Authorities are subject to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating your complaint. It may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a lawful basis to do so. Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website www.belfastmet.ac.uk. I realise that if I choose not to agree to these terms, the College will be unable to investigate my complaint. I understand that a copy of this form may be provided to a member of staff if they are the subject of the issue raised. I agree to be contacted by any contact method provided on this form, in respect of my complaint. I agree to be contacted by any contact method provided on this form, in respect of my complaint.

Complainant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Office Use Only

Date Received:

Date Acknowledged:

CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS FORM

If you require assistance with submitting this form, please contact the Data Protection and Complaints Officer by email: compliments@belfastmet.ac.uk. Please also submit the completed form to the same email address.

If we have done something well, we value and appreciate your positive feedback

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms Other:
Name:	
Contact Address:	
Tel Number:	
Email:	
Student ID (if applicable)	

Personal details **Status: Please tick below as appropriate:-**

Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent or Guardian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	Member of the Public	<input type="checkbox"/>	Employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Status category section

Details of Compliment: Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved if known. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.

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Details of Compliment Section

This form should be returned:

By post to: Data Protection and Complaints Executive, Integrated Shared Services Centre, 398 Springfield Road, Belfast, BT12 7DU

By e-mail to: complaints@belfastmet.ac.uk

NB: You can post your complaint externally or leave it at your nearest Campus Reception.

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and used for the purpose of investigating your complaint. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a **public task** or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller e.g. Public Authorities are subject to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating your complaint. It may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a lawful basis to do so. Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website www.belfastmet.ac.uk

I agree to be contacted by any contact method provided on this form, in respect of my compliment. I realise that if I choose not to agree to these terms, the College will be unable to record my compliment.

Customer Signature: _____ Date: _____

Office Use Only

Date Received:

Date Acknowledged:

Appendix 3

Complaints Process

