

**COMPLAINTS AND
COMPLIMENTS POLICY**

Academic Year: 2016/17

Target Audience:

All Staff
All Students
Governors
Members of the Public

Summary of Contents:

This Policy advises customers and staff on the College's commitment to providing a high quality service by ensuring that questions and problems are resolved quickly, as close to the source as possible and to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Enquiries: Any enquiries about the contents of this document should be addressed to: -

Title: Senior Customer Services Officer

Address: Lisburn Campus
25 Castle Street
Lisburn
BT25 4SU

Tel: 0345 600 7555 ext. 1738

E-mail: auprichard@serc.ac.uk

Final Approval by:

CMT: 11th August 2016

Governing Body: 27th September
2016

Policy Number: 043-2016

Created: Aug 2016
Review Due: Aug 2018

Related Documents:

Complaints and Compliments SOP

**Superseded Documents (if
applicable):**

Customer Feedback Policy 11-2008
4-2010
6-2013
038-2015

**Equality of Opportunity and Good
Relations Screening Information
(Section 75):**

Date Policy Screened – 6th June 2016

1.0 Policy Statement

- 1.1 SERC 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.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 For the purposes of this policy, a customer may be a student, staff member¹, member of the public or third party stakeholder.
- 2.2 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.
 - The organisation monitors the effectiveness of its complaint handling and responsiveness.
- 2.3 In addition, the College will:
 - Ensure that all positive comments are passed on to the relevant staff members.

¹ Staff employment policies and procedures are separate from this policy and take precedence. The exact process for dealing with a staff complaint will depend on the nature of the complaint and the applicable policy or procedure.

- 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.
- Monitor and review complaints and compliments for quality assurance and equality monitoring purposes.

2.4 Exemptions to this policy include:

- Anonymous complaints, which will not usually be investigated, but will be recorded.
- Matters where another policy or procedure applies.
- The right of the College not to investigate unreasonable or vexatious complaints.

3.0 Categories of Customer Feedback

3.1 Compliments and Comments

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 they are available at reception.
- Email the College on info@serc.ac.uk
- 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 e.g. face-to-face discussion.

Where a resolution cannot be found or if the complaint is sufficiently serious, the customer may submit a formal complaint in writing.

3.3 Formal Complaint

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

- Complete a 'Complaints Form' (Appendix 1). Forms are downloadable from the College website or available at reception.
- Email the College on complaints@serc.ac.uk

If a customer wishes to complain verbally, they will be asked to confirm details of their complaint in writing.

If assistance is required with the completion of or the submission of a complaint, customers should contact the Senior Customer Services Officer.

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 person under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult. Consent of the individual may be required.

All formal complaints will be forwarded to the relevant Responsible Owner² for an open and objective 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 defined as the individual appointed to investigate the complaint

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

**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.*

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.

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 Principal and Chief Executive.³
- 4.2 Following receipt of an appeal the College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed below (Table 2).

² In the event that the 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 appeal will then be to the Governing Body.

³ Responsible owners are defined in the separate Standard Operating Procedure

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
Appeal response letter/email to customer	20 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email issued

- 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.

5.0 If a Customer remains dissatisfied

- 5.1 It is hoped that we will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints procedure. If the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome they have the right to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Ombudsman's Office (in his/her role as Commissioner for Complaints).
- 5.2 The customer can complain to the Ombudsman; however, the Ombudsman will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Customer Complaints Policy. Contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

6.0 Monitoring Complaints and Compliments

- 6.1 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.

7.0 Communication

- 7.1 This Policy will be communicated via the staff intranet and will be made available, on request, in alternative formats including large print, braille, audio, and in minority languages to meet the requirements of those who are not fluent in English.

8.0 Review

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

COMPLAINTS FORM

If you require assistance with making a complaint, please contact complaints@serc.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 his or her 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)					
Status (please tick)					
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"/>

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)					
Status (please tick)					
Do you have their consent to raise this matter?: Y/N					
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"/>

SECTION 2

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.

Have you attempted to resolve this issue informally? Yes / No
If Yes, please summarise any action taken to resolve your issue/s to date.

SECTION 3

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

This form should be returned to:
Senior Customer Services Officer, SERC, 25 Castle Street, Lisburn, BT27 4SU or emailed to complaints@serc.ac.uk

I understand that a copy of this form may be provided to a member of staff if they are the subject of the issue.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Office Use Only

Date Received:

Date Acknowledged:

Received By:

Responsible Owner:

COMPLIMENTS FORM

If you require assistance with submitting this form please contact info@serc.ac.uk

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)		
Status (please tick)		
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"/>
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.		

This form should be returned to:
 Senior Customer Services Officer, SERC, 25 Castle Street, Lisburn, BT27 4SU or emailed to info@serc.ac.uk

Signed: _____ Date: _____

<u>Office Use Only</u>	
Date Received:	Date Acknowledged:
Received By:	Responsible Owner:

Customer Complaints Process

