



## Complaints Policy and Procedures

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<b>Lead manager</b>	Head of Quality
<b>Approval level</b>	Board of Governors through Academic Board
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## Introduction

1. The Complaints Policy and Procedure is designed to help our learners to raise issues, problems, or complaints and to obtain a speedy response to resolve any complaints. This policy is formulated in accordance with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code> (2024).
2. Integral to Acquire Learning College's approach to monitoring and enhancing all aspects of its operation are learners' views. The views of learners are welcome and Acquire Learning College believes that learners should be provided with the opportunity to express concerns about all aspects of Acquire Learning College's operations through providing feedback or making a complaint.

## Definition of a Complaint

3. Acquire Learning College defines a complaint as:

***“The expression of a specific concern about the provision of a course/module, a programme of study, or a related academic service.”***

We also have a separate **Appeals Policies** for Further Education and Short Courses and Higher Education and Foundation, concerning decisions of awarding bodies and designated providers working on delegated authority concerning academic decisions for progressions, assessment, and awards.

## Communicating our Complaints Policy

4. Information about our Complaints Policy is widely available through:
  - a. Acquire Learning College website
  - b. The Learner Handbook
  - c. The Staff Handbook
  - d. Learner Representatives' meetings

Learners and staff are also informed about the Complaints Policy at:

- a. Staff induction and at the start of the academic year.
- b. Learner induction to their course.
- c. At Learner Representative meetings.

Senior staff are reminded of their responsibility to deal effectively with complaints through the staff review process.

## The Scope of our Complaints Policy

5. Our Complaints Procedure can be used by:
  - a. individuals applying to Acquire Learning College.
  - b. current learners.

- c. learners who completed their course or left Acquire Learning College within the previous three months.

Our Complaints Procedure covers situations where a learner has a serious complaint concerning:

- a. the conduct of a member of staff towards him or her.
- b. the delivery of a programme upon which he or she is enrolled, which cannot be resolved by informal processes.
- c. a service provided by our Centre which cannot be resolved by informal processes.

Our Complaints Procedure does not cover:

- a. appeals against the decision of Assessment Boards – see Appeals Policy.
- b. appeals against the decisions of the Extenuation Panel – see Extenuating Circumstances Policy.
- c. complaints against the Learners' Representative Body – see Role of Learner Representatives.
- d. appeals against decisions taken under disciplinary proceeding.
- e. complaints about the behaviour of other learners.
- f. appeals against the decision of Investigating Panels.
- g. complaints that relate to a matter of academic judgment.

### **General Principles**

- 6. We recognise that complaints need to be resolved well, and we have put in place processes that support and expect people to act reasonably and fairly towards each other and treat the processes themselves with respect and not abuse them. We will:
  - a. Have fair, effective, and timely procedures for dealing with complaints and to ensure confidentiality (unless disclosure is necessary to enable the complaint to be progressed).
  - b. Ensure our complaints procedure is overseen and reviewed by senior staff.
  - c. Encourage regular feedback and ensure that all learners can raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage.
  - d. Ensure our complaints procedure is always publicly accessible and that can be easily understood by all our learners and staff.
  - e. Implement our complaints procedure with regards to any applicable law(s).
  - f. Ensure that appropriate action is taken following a complaint (whether informal or formal).
    - i. Make provision available to support and guide any persons complaining including provision for persons being accompanied at any stage, including formal hearings.
  - g. Have in place effective arrangements to monitor, evaluate, and improve the effectiveness of our complaints procedures and to reflect on the outcomes to make future improvements and learn from lessons.

- h. Provide suitable briefings and support for all staff and learners involved in handling or supporting a complaint.

### **Complaints Procedure and Timeframe**

- 7. Before submitting a complaint, learners are advised to consider whether the matter is concern/ feedback or a complaint and whether there are other more suitable ways for them to express their concerns. For example, this may be through discussion with the Course Tutor, Learner Welfare Officer, Enrolment Officer and through their Learner Representative (and the monthly Learner Representatives meeting with college staff) for their class and through the course feedback surveys.
- 8. Acquire Learning College will deal with concerns and complaints in a manner proportionate to the complexity of the matter and would encourage informal proceedings to be used wherever possible in the first instance – unless there is a serious complaint.
- 9. Our complaints procedure allows for an informal complaint to move to a Stage 2 Formal Complaint where appropriate, and a learner can be supported by the Learner Welfare Officer to move to a formal complaint procedure.

### **Stage One - Informal Complaints Procedure**

- a. Learners are advised to consider the diverse ways in which they can provide feedback or express concern about issues that can more effectively and efficiently be dealt with through Acquire Learning College informal avenues and on-going learner/ customer feedback processes. Acquire Learning College regularly seeks the views of its customers/ learners through:
  - i. The Learner Representatives meeting with Academic and Administrative Staff which is held monthly and covers areas all areas of the curriculum, standards, facilities etc.
  - ii. End of course unit feedback form/review - a formal feedback form on each unit which is completed at the end of the course assessment each semester.
  - iii. One-to-one feedback and discussion between the teaching staff and learners.
- b. Deciding on whether a complaint can be dealt with informally or formally may also depend on the nature of the complaint and how the complainant would like the issue to be resolved. At each stage, the person investigating the complaint will make sure they:
  - i. Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved.
  - ii. Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
  - iii. Meet the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary).
  - iv. Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

- v. Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied by a representative
  - vi. Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
  - vii. Keep notes of the interview.
- c. At each stage in the procedure Acquire Learning College will also bear in mind the ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be enough to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:
- i. An apology
  - ii. An explanation.
  - iii. An admission that the situation could have been managed differently or better.
  - iv. An assurance that the event complained about will not recur.
  - v. An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again.
  - vi. An undertaking to review our policies/ practices considering the complaint.
- d. The outcome of a complaint – both informal and formal, is given to the learner in writing. The outcome is also monitored and reviewed as part of the review and quality management processes. The outcome and actions of the Learner Representatives meetings are to the Learning Wall and displayed on the notice boards so that learners are aware of the points raised and the actions taken as a result. The outcome of learner surveys and customer feedback are also made available to learners and all staff through Learning Wall and through Acquire Learning College notice boards.
- e. Before a learner raises a formal complaint, they are encouraged to seek the advice of the Learner Representatives. All learners are encouraged to attempt to resolve their complaint informally and conciliate on the issue with the member of staff most directly concerned before submitting a formal complaint.
- f. If a learner does not want to contact their tutor or other member of staff concerned with their complaint, the learner can contact Acquire Learning College Academic Head or the Learner Welfare Office who are responsible for the co-ordination of learner complaint procedure. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with the complaint, the Academic Head will consider referring the complaint to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior – but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.
- g. If a learner believes that the complaint cannot be resolved through conciliation with the member of staff - or if they wish to proceed directly to a formal complaint, then the

learner/ complainant can complete the Complaint Form and return it to the Learner Welfare Officer and proceed to the formal complaints process. The Learner Welfare Officer will help the learner to complete the complaint form if required.

### **Stage Two - Formal Complaint Procedure**

10. Throughout our complaints procedure we will ensure:

- a. Confidentiality at the informal stage.
- b. Accessibility of information.
- c. Clarity of procedure.
- d. A staged approach with specified times and an informal and formal stage.
- e. Advice and support in using the procedure.
- f. Stated response times.
- g. Resolution at local level wherever possible.
- h. Entitlement to have a well-founded and documented formal complaint heard.
- i. Every effort made by Acquire Learning College to prevent victimization of a learner who has made a complaint.

11. The stages of the learner complaints procedure are designed to provide a response to the complaint at the earliest feasible opportunity. Learners are made aware of the importance of keeping a note of the discussions they have at each stage and the dates on which they take place. When making an informal or formal complaint, learners are advised to keep copies of relevant documents. Additionally, they may wish to have the support of a friend, who could accompany them to meetings when their complaint is discussed. This is particularly important when the learner is making a formal complaint as the complaint form requires specific information and evidence, if possible, to back up their complaint. The Learner Welfare Officer can also provide support in completing the forms and in accompanying learners to a formal hearing of their complaint if required.

12. Acquire Learning College requires that the learner making the complaint must be present at any formal hearing or panel review. The learner can be supported but cannot be represented in their absence. We would not normally expect a learner to be accompanied by legal representation unless this had been discussed and agreed with Acquire Learning College beforehand. Legal representation is likely to be the exception rather than the rule.

13. Staff are provided with support and guidance regarding handling complaints through guidance the staff handbook and through briefing notes that may from time to time be provided to staff during staff meetings and training. Staff are briefed in how the informal stages of complaints relate to formal stages – and the processes and opportunities available to learners to provide feedback. Staff are informed of the importance of keeping notes of meetings and outcomes of discussions with complainants. They are also informed of the limits to their authority - any

outcome of a complaint that results in a decision or changes must be agreed with senior management or Acquire Learning College's CEO and Principal.

14. Where a member of staff is the subject of the complaint, they will be able to seek support from a colleague and will also be invited to have a colleague present at any formal hearing of a complaint against them. The HR Manager may also be involved to provide support where appropriate. The outcome of a complaint - both informal and formal – is given to the learner in writing. The letter will confirm the completion of proceedings, with the decision/ outcome reached and the reason for reaching the decision.
15. A formal complaint will be reviewed by an appropriate senior member of staff which will be the Head of Academics or Head of Finance depending on the nature of the complaint. The Principal may be the most appropriate senior person in some circumstances. If having made a formal complaint the learner is happy with the outcome the process will be complete, and a formal record of the complaint will be filed, and any resulting action will be monitored and reviewed.
16. If at any time a learner makes a formal complaint to the police or takes other legal action at the same time they use this procedure, then no further investigation by Acquire Learning College using this procedure will be undertaken. The complainant and Acquire Learning College must adhere to any matters relating to the Law and any breaches of the Law will be dealt with by the appropriate authority.
17. The formal complaints procedure should not be confused with 'whistleblowing.' Acquire Learning College has a 'whistle-blowing policy and procedure where it is appropriate to use this.

### **Stage Three - Complaints Panel**

18. If it is not possible to resolve a complaint satisfactorily at the highest level within Acquire Learning College (by the relevant Department Head), then a Complaints Panel will be set up to deal with the complaint. The Complaints Panel will normally consist of the Head of Administrative Operations, the Head Academics, and our CEO and Principal.
19. If the complaint still cannot be resolved to a satisfactory conclusion, then the learner will be advised that the procedure within Acquire Learning College has been exhausted and the matter for Acquire Learning College is closed. The learner will be advised that the only course of action left for the complainant is to contact the Office of the Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

### **Timeframes**

#### **Informal Stage of Complaint**

20. Wherever possible we would encourage an informal complaint to be dealt with immediately and encourage the complainant to discuss the matter with the person directly involved or the

Learner Welfare Officer. It is possible that if the complaint requires a simple response, it can be dealt with **within 24 hours**. If the complaint is not raised immediately then an informal complaint should be raised within **ten days** of the initial cause for concern. Acquire Learning College commits to respond and to provide a written record of the outcome to the complaint within **five working days**.

21. If the initial discussion about the complaint does not lead to a satisfactory outcome, then:
  - a. The learner can take the issue to one or more of the following appropriate contacts: The Learner Welfare Officer, the CEO and Principal, or the Head Academics.
  - b. Where the outcome of the complaint is satisfactory, the learner will receive a written statement of a satisfactory outcome within **five working days**.
  - c. If the complaint cannot be resolved within **ten working days** and, if the having talked the complaint through in a confidential manner, there is still not a satisfactory outcome then learners are advised to use the formal complaint procedure.

### **Formal Stage of Complaint**

21. A formal complaint should be made no later than **one calendar month** after the initial concern/problem/ incident. A formal complaint is made using the formal complaints form (see Appendix A). Hard copies are available from the Learner Welfare Officer. The form is also available online through the website and through the Learning Wall and Learner Handbook. If the learner has not already used the informal complaint process, they are advised to consult with their tutor, the Learner Welfare Officer, a friend, or a Learner Representative before completing the form.
22. The completed form should be sent (by email if possible), marked 'Confidential Complaint', to the Head of Academics. If a complaint is directed at a named member or members of staff, he/she/they will be advised of the complaint and invited to respond. At this point it will no longer be possible for the complainant to remain anonymous. The learner will receive a response within **15 working days**.

### **Complaints Panel**

23. If the issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Department Head, then a Complaints Panel will be convened within ten **working days** of the formal response being given to the learner. The Panel members will be represented by senior staff including the Head of Administrative Operations and the Head of Academics - with an independent chair which would normally be the CEO and Principal of Acquire Learning College. The learner will be invited to the panel to discuss the matter further. If a resolution is reached at the Panel, the learner will receive a written response, detailing the outcome within **five working days**.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

19. Acquire Learning College is committed to continuously improving its service to learners and to raising standards throughout. Taking account of feedback and complaints is an important and effective way of making changes that can result in a positive contribution to our quality assurance and enhancement framework. Monitoring and evaluation will also help us ensure that the complaints procedure is working effectively. Acquire Learning College will record, monitor, and evaluate the feedback and complaints received and the action taken.
20. The Learner Welfare Officer will collect and collate information for all complaints (informal and formal) at all stages. The Learner Welfare Officer will monthly do this. The outcome of the **Complaints Log** (see Appendix B) summary will be disseminated through The Learning Wall, college notice boards and the Learner Representatives Meetings.
21. Informal complaints raised through the Learner Representative meetings will not record individual learner data, but a record of the issues raised, and the action taken because of the issue(s) will be monitored and reviewed. Records are kept and the outcome of action is fed back to the next meeting of the Learner Representatives.
22. For other individual learner informal or formal complaint where the Learner Welfare Officer has a record of the complaint and is aware of the name of the learner concerned, data will be kept regarding the number of complaints made by:
  - a. learners in year one or year two of their studies.
  - b. the course group of the learner.
  - c. the gender and ethnicity of those making a complaint.
  - d. whether those learners making a complaint had a disability.
  - e. the age profile of the complainant(s).
  - f. the number of complaints made by international learners, learners from EU communities other than the UK, and UK learners.
23. The Learner Welfare Officer will produce a summary report at the end of each semester (three times a year). The summary report will be seen and reviewed by the senior management team (CEO and Principal, Head of Administrative Operations and Head of Quality). An end of year report will also be produced for the Academic Committee to consider as part of its review of provision and forward planning.
24. Acquire Learning College will publicise to all staff and learners, information from summary reports of the complaints and feedback. This will help raise awareness of the procedures themselves and will enhance the confidence of learners and staff of the transparency and effectiveness of Acquire Learning College complaints procedures.

**Appendix A**

**Formal Complaint Form**

<b>1. Personal Details</b>	
Name:	Learner ID:
Programme:	Year:
Address:	Telephone No:
	Email
<b>2. Complaint Details</b>	
Please state the nature of your complaint and give further details (use separate sheets if necessary). Please give exact date(s)/time(s) and location(s) of incident(s) wherever possible. Retrospective complaints (three calendar months after the informal complaint) will not be considered.	
Do you have any documentary evidence to support your complaint? Please give details and attach copies where possible.	

From your point of view, what would be the desired outcome of your complaint?

What prevented the complaint from being resolved informally?

Who else have you discussed this complaint with (e.g., Head of Learner Services)? Has advice been given and have you acted on this advice?

Can you suggest any action which will prevent this situation from recurring?

### 3. Declaration

I declare that the information given in this formal complaint form is a true statement of the acts and that I would be willing, if required, to answer further questions related to it.

I also agree (in accordance with the Data Protection Act) to this form being held on file by the Head of Learner Services.

Signed:

Date:

**Completed forms should be handed in to the Administration Office, for which you will be given a receipt.**

For Office Use only:

Date complaint received..... Date receipt provided.....

Office Reference ..... Name of the recipient .....

Complaint form sent to .....

*Remember to send a copy to the Head of Learner Services*

**Appendix B**

**COMPLAINT LOG – SUMMARY SHEET**

<b>DATE RECEIVED</b>	<b>SOURCE OF COMPLAINT NAME / LEARNER REPRESENTATIVES MEETING (SRM)</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT</b>	<b>ACTION TAKEN</b>	<b>DATE OF ACTION</b>	<b>COLLEGE AUTHORISED SIGNATURE</b>