




THE
BEDFORD
COLLEGE
GROUP

Policy Name	QD10: Have Your Say Policy (Complements, Suggestion and Complaints)
Department	Quality
Created by (Job Title)	Head of Quality
Date Reviewed	August 2021
Date of Next Review	August 2023
Pathway	Intranet: Quality > Policies and Procedures > QD10
QR Code	
E & D Policy Disclaimer	This policy has been reviewed in line with the Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following categories of individual as Protected Characteristics: Age, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex (gender), Sexual orientation and Disability. We will continue to monitor this policy and to ensure that it has equal access and does not discriminate against anyone, especially any person/s listed under any protected characteristic.

Purpose

- 1 Ofqual's general conditions of recognition, August 2018, section C2.3(i) pp.30, requires The Bedford College Group as a centre to '*operate a complaints handling procedure or appeals process for the benefit of Learners*'.
- 2 Whilst the Bedford College Group is committed to meeting its statutory obligations as laid out in section 1 above; it is also committed to ensuring that it uses this process to help it achieve an outstanding teaching, learning and training experience for all its learners.
- 3 The Complaints Policy is operated through a feedback system within all areas of the Bedford College Group, known as 'Have Your Say' (HYS) and is applicable for all areas of the Group's provision. The policy deals with:
 - Learning, teaching and assessment
 - Information provided by the College: standards of service
 - Information technology: equipment
 - Accommodation, car parking and facilities.
- 4 The Bedford College Group takes all complaints and suggestions seriously. As part of its commitment to high-quality service, the group listens to, records, acts on information received and provides appropriate feedback. This process ensures that all concerns / comments are dealt with professionally and are resolved as soon as possible.
- 5 The Bedford College Group complaints policy has been developed to:
 - Be easily accessible
 - Be simple to understand and use
 - Allow speedy handling with established time limits for action
 - Keep people informed of progress
 - Ensure a full and fair investigation
 - Respect people's desire for confidentiality
 - Provide information to managers so that services can be improved.

Making a complaint

6 **What is a complaint?**

In general terms, it is an expression of dissatisfaction about the groups action or lack of action or a specific concern about the provision of a study programme, support service, administrative system or policy operated by or on behalf of the Bedford College Group.

It also includes any specific concern about the activities of its students whilst on College owned property or staff engaged in college business.

7 **What is not considered a complaint?**

Academic assessment, for example, grades and marks. These are covered by the group's Academic Appeals procedure.

Bullying, harassment or discrimination. These are covered by the group's Anti-Bullying Policy.

Any attempt to reopen or reconsider a complaint the College have concluded or given their final decision on.

8 **Who can make a complaint?**

Any person affected by The Bedford College Group services.

Third party complaints will be considered, it is encouraged that a third party with a complaint approach the College directly. If the College are provided with clear authority that a representative is acting on your behalf, the College can accept such a complaint.

Anonymous complaints/suggestions will be considered, dependent on the seriousness of the complaint and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources. However, Bedford College Group is unable to respond to anonymous comments.

9 **When should I complain?**

Complaints can be made at any time up to 6 months from the actual end date of your course as stated in our records.

If you are a student and are considering raising a complaint, you should reflect on whether you have fulfilled your own responsibilities, both in terms of meeting academic commitments and through behaviour which shows consideration for others. If, for example, your problem has arisen partly through non-attendance, or failing to read information provided, it may be more difficult to sustain a complaint.

PROCEDURE

Informal Complaints – Stage 0

- 10 If you are dissatisfied with the service or treatment you receive you should first raise the matter with a member of staff. Tell them exactly what you are unhappy about and ask for their help in putting it right. Most problems will be resolved quickly and informally in this way.
- 11 Issues raised verbally to a member of staff will be, wherever possible, dealt with immediately by the staff member. However, there may be some instances where the complaint is referred to the appropriate line manager or the college's quality department.

Formal Complaints – Stage 1

- 12 Where it has not been possible to satisfactorily resolve matters informally, a formal complaint should be submitted to the college via our **online form**. This is available via the following locations:
 - Northamptonshire locations: www.tresham.ac.uk/contact-us/have-your-say
 - Bedfordshire locations: www.bedford.ac.uk/contact-us/have-your-say

This approach provides the fastest and most accurate way to feedback to us.

- 13 Should any other member of college staff, including customer services, the College Leadership Group (CLG) or Clerk to the Governors be sent details of a complaint directly, then these will be forwarded to the quality department as soon as possible in order for the complaint to be formally logged and processed.
- 14 Only when the quality department receives the complaint will the response timescales provided within this policy apply.
- 15 To ensure a prompt response the complaint must be specific and comprehensively documented. The complainant should present full details, including:

name and address of the complainant,
any relevant documentation, dates, locations and witnesses as appropriate
any previous unsuccessful attempts at resolution
what reasonable steps should be taken to resolve the complaint.

- 16 The complainant should expect to receive an acknowledgement of their written complaint within three working days.
- 17 Complaints will be allocated to an appropriate Investigating Officer within the college who will investigate in a thorough, objective and transparent manner and provide feedback.
- 18 The complainant will normally receive a response from the investigating officer within twenty-one working days setting out the result of the investigation and any actions that will be taken. However, where complaints involve complex or multiple complaints, in order to ensure that the investigation process is complete and robust, investigations may take longer.
- 19 If the investigation is likely to exceed twenty-one working days, we will contact the complainant and tell them when we expect a response to be available.
- 20 Communication with the complainant will be via their preferred route, i.e. post, email, etc. If a preferred route isn't indicated, the response will be via the medium that the complaint was initially sent.

Appeal - Stage Two

- 21 If a Stage One complaint is closed but it is felt that the complaint remains unresolved, complainants can make a formal appeal. Any comments about the way in which the complaint was dealt with, or any appeal against the findings and/or actions, should be made in writing to the *Director of Quality Improvement and LTA*, setting out the grounds for appeal, within five working days of receipt of the outcome.
The request should include:
 - The original reference number of the original complaint.
 - Full and specific details of why the complainant wishes to appeal the Stage One decision
- 22 The appeal will be acknowledged prior to any investigation.
- 23 The *Director of Quality Improvement and LTA* will appoint a Senior Investigating Officer to review the evidence and respond to the complainant within five working days of being appointed. Where appeals involve complex or multiple complaints, in order to ensure that the investigation process is complete and robust, investigations may take longer.
- 24 If the investigation is likely to exceed five working days, we will contact the complainant and tell them when we expect a response to be available.
- 25 The outcome of the appeal is the final decision of the college and no further internal investigation will take place relating to this specific complaint.

Complaints that cannot be resolved by the college

- 26 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the way the College has dealt with their complaint after exhausting the identified *Have Your Say* process, they may also wish to complain in writing to the appropriate awarding organisation, funding body or, for complaints specifically relating Higher Education, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
- 27 The college will support any legitimate external review of an investigation into a complaint, whilst being mindful of the Data Protection Act.

Upheld complaints

- 28 Complaints that are upheld receive an internal action plan to prevent future incidents of the same nature.
- 29 Upheld complaints are recorded and monitored on an annual basis.

If a complaint is about a member of staff

- 30 If a complaint is in relation to a member of staff, the college's Human Resources department will be notified at the same time as the complaint is formally recorded.
- 31 If a complaint is in relation to the Principal and Chief Executive of the College the College Governors (via the Clerk to the Governors) will be asked to investigate the complaint.

Praise and Suggestions

- 32 Praise and suggestions provided through the *Have Your Say* Policy are also welcome and valuable to the College Group as a whole. These comments are recorded and passed on to the relevant department and/or person.

Data Protection

- 33 The Bedford College Group is mindful of its requirement to comply with Data Protection requirements and, where personal information of someone considered as an adult may be discussed in a complaint, we will request permission to proceed from the person(s) involved.
- 34 Where it is impractical to obtain a letter of consent, a response will be sent directly to the person(s) involved, rather than the nominated complainant. The complainant will be informed of this.

General Points

- 35 Anonymous feedback cannot receive a formal response, but may still be recorded and investigated.
- 36 Abusive feedback containing offensive language is not tolerated. Whilst it is recognised that some communication may be written in anger, it is unlikely that abusive communication containing offensive language will be taken seriously.
- 37 Due to the need for sufficient facilitation and investigation, the need for college staff is vital. It is due to this that the *Have Your Say* process is only active during term time and will cease during scheduled college holidays.

External Providers

- 38 Complaints about courses delivered in partnership with other training providers or universities will be investigated following the college's *Have Your Say* policy in the first instance. Any complaints sent to these providers will be forwarded to the quality department to be investigated appropriately. The outcome of such investigations will be shared with the specific partner.
- 39 Complaints about the service provided by business not owned by the college but operating on college premises are not within the scope of this Policy. Complaints relating to External Service Providers should be made directly to the manager concerned, or to the relevant Head Office.

How we value feedback

- 40 The Bedford College Group takes the view that complaints provide valuable feedback that allows us to improve our service. All complainants have the opportunity to raise matters of concern without risk of being disadvantaged, discriminated against or victimised as a result of making a complaint. All complaints, whether formal or informal, will be recognised and dealt with sympathetically and constructively. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
- 41 In addition to wanting to deal quickly and effectively with any complaints, the College is also very pleased to receive praise or suggestions for how things can be improved.
- 42 Whilst the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are supported, it is not recommended that feedback is given to the college this way. A number of more secure alternatives are provided by the college.
- 43 Social networks are monitored for feedback relating to the college and challenges accordingly. Whilst appreciative of the manner that social media is used, each comment will be considered for further action. Positive and/or negative feedback received by the college in this way will be considered by the quality department and a response signposting the user to use the online feedback form will be provided.
- 44 A confidential and secure record will be maintained by the quality department relating to all correspondence with the college relating to praise, suggestion or complaint. This record will be carefully monitored:
to acknowledge praise from our stakeholders
to ensure suggestions are carefully considered and responded to
to ensure that complaints are properly addressed and that the time frames specified are kept to
to identify where improvements can be made to the services and operations of the College
- 45 *Have Your Say* users may be guided to an online survey after the investigation is complete. This is to provide the opportunity for specific feedback on the management of the Talkback process, rather than the complaint or its outcome.

Reporting

- 46 The quality department will use the *Have Your Say* records to report at regular intervals to the Bedford College Group Executive on all complaints, suggestions and compliments and produce an annual summary of customer feedback to governors.

- 47 An annual report will be completed each year in order to report on, and analyse, key metrics. A resultant QIP will ensure that the outcomes of complaint investigations remain a key driver of Quality Improvement.

Data Retention

- 48 Complaints, praise and suggestions received by the college will be securely retained for a total period of seven years. The information retained will include:
All correspondence relating to the praise/suggestion/complaint
All items relating to the decision being made for each stage of the process
- 49 The retention of information is in accordance with the College's *Data Retention Policy*.

Have Your Say - Availability

- 50 The *Have Your Say* form is available [on the college website](#) (or large font/print is available on request) and, if requested, can be completed by an independent member of college support staff on your behalf.
- 51 This policy can be freely accessed by any stakeholder via our specific external websites:
- Northamptonshire locations: www.tresham.ac.uk/contact-us/have-your-say
 - Bedford locations: www.bedford.ac.uk/contact-us/have-your-say
- 52 This policy is provided to all users of the *Have Your Say* process at the time of acknowledgement and upon request.
- 53 Whilst the policy is available to college stakeholders, college employees or contracted staff are encouraged to speak with appropriate line management or seek support via Human Resources.
- 54 Learners who have not met their agreed contractual obligations with the college, financially or educationally, are not eligible to use the *Have Your Say* process.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 55 The optional information provided as part of the *Have Your Say* complaint, praise and suggestion process is treated confidentially and will contribute to the development of college policies and procedures aimed at ensuring all groups who may have traditionally been discriminated against will be treated fairly and equally by the Bedford College Group.
- 56 EDI data is requested from each *Have Your Say* user to anonymously collate and analyse feedback from different protected groups.

Links to Other Information

- Have Your Say leaflet
- Anti-Bullying policy
- Academic Appeals policy
- Consumer Law
- [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#) (Higher Education Only)