

South Bank Colleges

Complaints and Suggestions Policy

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Policy

- This policy outlines how South Bank Colleges manages complaints, suggestions, and praise from individuals who use or are affected by its services.
- It aims to ensure all feedback is handled fairly, consistently, and used to improve service quality.

Who Can Use This Policy

- The policy applies to students, apprentices, parents, employers, partners, and members of the public.
- Complaints may also be submitted by third parties acting with proper authority on behalf of an individual eligible to make a complaint to the college.
- Anonymous complaints may be considered depending on severity and evidence.

Overall Approach

- The College encourages early and informal resolution wherever possible.
- Complaints are managed through a structured three-stage process.
- All complaints are recorded, monitored, and used to inform service improvements.

The Complaints Process

- Stage 1 – Informal Resolution: The complainant raises the issue with a member of staff or service area, and attempts local resolution.
- Stage 2 – Formal Complaint: If unresolved, the complaint is submitted formally and investigated by a manager, with a written response provided.
- Stage 3 – Appeal: If dissatisfied, the complainant can appeal the outcome, which is reviewed by senior leadership. The outcome is final.

High-Risk Complaints

- Complaints involving serious allegations such as discrimination, legal breaches, or personal injury are escalated directly to senior management and HR for formal investigation.

Key Timeframes

- Complaints should normally be made within three months of the incident.
- Formal complaints are acknowledged within five working days.
- Investigations typically conclude within ten working days from the start of the investigation.
- Appeals must be submitted within 28 days of the outcome.

Exceptions and Alternative Processes

- Certain issues are handled under separate policies, including: student disciplinary matters, recruitment or admissions process, and academic assessment decisions.
- Staff complaints are managed through HR policies.
- Vexatious or previously resolved complaints will not be considered under this policy.

External Review Options

- If internal procedures are exhausted, complainants may escalate to external bodies such as the ESFA, GLA, or OIA, depending on the type of course/programme.

Key Principles

- Complaints are handled with fairness, confidentiality, and professionalism.
- Complainants will not be disadvantaged for raising concerns.
- The College is committed to learning from feedback and continuously improve its services.

Complaints and Suggestions Policy

1. Introduction

South Bank Colleges are committed to providing an excellent service to its students and apprentices, their parents, employers, partners, and the local community. However, there may be, on occasions, situations that lead to a complaint being made, suggestions about how the college can perform even better and instances where a member of staff is identified for praise. This policy outlines how complaints, suggestions and praise, whether they are written or verbal, will be dealt with by the college.

Any customer complaint, suggestion or praise is used to support the college's commitment to excellence. This document defines the principles supporting the policy. In addition, further details of the procedures are contained in Appendix A. Appendix B provides an illustration of the procedure detailed in the policy. Appendix C includes the form that needs to be completed if there is a complaint, suggestion or praise. Finally, Appendix D is for internal use providing guidance for staff who are asked to investigate complaints.

To register your complaint, suggestion or praise, please contact:
feedback@southbankcolleges.ac.uk

To ensure a prompt response, the complaint must be specific and comprehensively documented. The complainant should present full details, including:

- Your personal information: name, course / organisation / relationship with the College and your contact details.
- Any relevant documentation, dates, locations and witnesses as appropriate.
- Any previous unsuccessful attempt at resolution.
- The action or outcome you would like.

Any questions about the interpretation or application of the policy and procedure should be addressed to the Quality and System Officer at South Bank Colleges. Please note that the college will maintain the highest levels of confidentiality in relation to your complaint, if appropriate, as well as manage your suggestions and praise appropriately.

Is this the correct policy to use?

Please note that in some cases, using the Complaints and Suggestions Policy may not be the most appropriate one if you wish to make a complaint. For example, if the complaint is about one of the following issues, the most appropriate policy you should use, is shown below:

Issue	Policy to use
Disciplinary and exclusions	Behaviour Policy 2025-27
Applications and internal progression	Student Recruitment Policy (2025 26)
Assessments processes or decisions	Assessment Malpractice and Maladministration Policy 2025-26

Please note that these policies can be accessed via the college website.

If there are complaints raised by **South Bank Colleges staff**, these will be

addressed through the most appropriate college **Human Resources** policy.

2. Types of Complaints

Definitions

A **complaint** is defined as the formal expression of dissatisfaction by anyone who uses or is affected by any of the College's services and facilities.

Informal complaint 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.

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.

This policy outlines the principles which guide the organisation in implementing the complaints. The procedures in Appendix A, define the steps, actions and record keeping which should be followed. This ensures that all complaints will be dealt with consistently and fairly.

A **formal complaint** is one that cannot be resolved immediately at the local level and/or is directed to the following, regularly monitored, email address: feedback@southbankcolleges.ac.uk or in writing to the college's Quality and Systems Officer. Please note that all complaints addressed to staff at the college will be referred to the Quality and Systems officer who will direct the case to a senior manager for investigation or refer the complainant to the most appropriate college policy.

A **high risk complaint** is one which involves:

- Allegations of corruption against a college employee
- A claim of personal injury
- A claim of dereliction of duty by a college employee
- A claim that a law has been broken
- A claim of discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual, marital status, orientation, disability or age.

NB. A high risk complaint will be escalated by the Quality and Systems Officer to the Principal London South Bank Technical College (LSBTC) and will be reviewed as soon as possible.

Any complaints which are deemed to be high risk will be referred to the college's Human Resources department for a formal investigation.

A **vexatious complaint** is one which is:

- Primarily intended to annoy or distress other parties in a malicious way.
- Part of a series of complaints by the same complainant where other complaints have been investigated and resolved.
- A complaint promoted by an employee with the intention of bypassing or subverting the normal organisational procedures.

NB. Complaints which are recorded as vexatious will not be subject to the college's Complaints and Suggestions Policy.

3. Procedure

Before you use the Complaints and Suggestions Policy

In the first instance, it is expected that all complainants should attempt to resolve their complaint informally, dealing with the specific curriculum or service area. All staff have a responsibility, when faced with a customer complaint, to deal with it sympathetically, helpfully and constructively.

Only when this informal stage has been exhausted, should the formal complaints procedure be used. Complainants who have not used this informal stage and submit a complaint to the complaints email address will have their complaint referred back to the informal stage.

What is not considered a complaint?

- Academic assessment, for example complaints about a student's grades and marks. These are covered by the College's Exams and Assessment policy.
- Disciplinary and exclusions of current students or apprentices. These are covered by the Behaviour Policy.
- Applications to the college or internal progression. These are covered by the SBC Student Recruitment Policy.
- Any attempt to reopen or reconsider a complaint the College have concluded or given their final decision on.
- A vexatious complaint, as outlined in Section 2.

Who can make a complaint?

- Any person affected by services delivered by South Bank Colleges.
- Third party complaints will be considered provided they are acting with clear authority on behalf of an individual eligible to make a complaint to the college.
- Anonymous complaints, suggestions or instances of praise will be considered. In the event of a complaint this will be dependent on the seriousness of the incident and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources. However, South Bank Colleges are unable to respond to anonymous comments.

When should I complain?

- Complaints can be made at any time up to 3 months of the event that the complaint relates to.
- If you are a former student or apprentice and are considering raising a complaint, you should reflect on whether you have fulfilled your own responsibilities, both in terms of meeting academic commitments, such as the college's expected attendance (which is 90%, see the Behaviour Policy for details) and achieving assignments in a timely fashion and through behaviour which shows consideration for others.

4. Responsibilities

Overall Responsibility:

The Principal LSBTC, has overall responsibility for the implementation of the Complaints and Suggestions Policy and the management of the procedure.

The Principal LSBTC, is responsible for:

- Ensuring the complaint is investigated fairly and impartially by an appropriate investigating manager.
- Seeking a satisfactory resolution for the complainant, where the complaint can be substantiated.
- Maintaining records and information associated with each formal complaint.
- Monitoring complaints and their outcomes.
- Preparing an annual report to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Board of Trustees to allow discussion on any actions for improvement in services.

Monitoring:

The monitoring and recording of all formal complaints are the responsibility of the Quality and Systems Officer.

All information relating to a formal complaint is filed and recorded. All such information is treated as confidential.

Reports on complaints are presented termly to the Senior Leadership Team to identify and discuss actions for improvements. An annual report on customer service complaints will be presented to the Board of Trustees.

5. Principles and provisions

- All complaints, whether formal or informal, must be recognised and dealt with sympathetically and constructively.
- Confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
- No complainant will be disadvantaged, discriminated against or victimised as a result of making a complaint.
- Complaints will be investigated at a local level by a relevant manager in the first instance and, depending on the nature of the complaint, may be investigated by a senior manager.
- All written complaints, and if possible, verbal complaints, will be recorded and logged.
- Complainants will receive an acknowledgement of their written complaint within five working days of its receipt by the Quality and Systems Officer.
- The investigating manager will make initial contact with the complainant within five working days of receipt of their complaint.
- The complainant will be kept informed about the progress of their complaint regularly.
- An outcome of the investigation and any resolution to the complaint should be sent in writing to the complainant within fifteen working days of receipt of the original written complaint.

Anonymous complaints will be recorded, but not investigated unless they are considered “high-risk” complaints.

If the complaint is concerning a disability-related issue, the investigating manager may refer the matter to an external consultancy to ascertain the reasonableness of the complaint. This may extend the duration of the investigation. The complaint must be thoroughly and objectively investigated within the shortest period to determine if the complaint is well-founded and, if so, to work towards a mutually acceptable resolution.

6. Appeals

In the event that a complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant based on non-compliance with the procedure, or based on significant (and substantiated) failings of the investigation itself, or new evidence to support the original complaint, they may appeal the decision through the Quality and Standards Officer. This appeal must be logged within 28 days, of the receipt of the original outcome, relating to the initial formal complaint.

The appeal will be investigated by the Principal LSBTC or another member of the Senior Leadership Team. If the Principal LSBTC was involved in the original complaint, the appeal will be undertaken by the Executive Principal.

The appeal will review all documentation relating to the complaint and may also involve discussions with the complainant or others involved in the case before arising at a decision. If the original finding is upheld, this decision is final on behalf of the college and no further appeals will be permitted.

If a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, and they are an adult in receipt of Greater London Authority Funding, they can complain to the following address:

Provider complaints, Skills and Employment unit, Greater London Authority, 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL.
Or email: skillscomplaints@london.gov.uk.

Please note that you must contact the GLA within 12 months after the issue happened.

For all other student complaints, please refer to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). This must take place within 12 months after the issue happened. Contact details for the ESFA are shown below:

ESFA complaints team
complaints.ESFA@education.gov.uk
Complaints team
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT

For learners who are on a Higher National programme, having exhausted the college's internal procedures and subject to the provisions of legislation, they will have the right to request the Office of the Independent Adjudicator to review the relevant case. <http://oiahe.org.uk/>.

Copies of documentation relating to the complaint will be kept on file for 5 years.

7. AI and Use of AI

At South Bank Colleges we recognise the use of AI in researching, formatting and submitting complaints in a range of circumstances.

If using an AI tool to submit a complaint, we require the complainant to undertake the following.

At the outset of the complaint, please state:

1. Name of the AI tool used for support (e.g. Chat GPT, Claude, CoPilot, etc.)
2. List the prompts submitted to the AI tool.

This will help us to understand where some of the wider information has come from, look into it ourselves and better support the outcome and resolution.

Stage 1A: Receipt of informal complaints

On receipt of an informal complaint, the member of staff must determine whether it can be classified as a complaint to be dealt with under this policy. If in doubt, the member of staff should consult their line manager.

If the complaint can be resolved immediately with the complainant's agreement it is deemed to be informal and no further action is required.

However, it is the responsibility of the member of staff receiving the complaint to ensure the suggested solution is implemented and every action is taken to ensure the situation that caused the original complaint does not reoccur. A record of the nature of the complaint and its resolution should be kept.

If the issue cannot be resolved, the member of staff should write down details of the complaint, preferably on a complaint form and send it to the Quality and Systems Officer, within five working days. The complaint should be informed in writing of the action taken within five days. It will now be dealt with as a formal complaint.

All "high risk" complaints must be referred to the Quality and Systems Officer who will refer it to the Principal LSBTC.

Any complaint raised by a young person is to be copied to the manager with responsibility for safeguarding who will help determine if it is a safeguarding issue.

Stage 1B: Receipt of formal written complaints

On receipt of a formal (usually written) complaint, the Quality and Systems Officer will confirm the complaint has been received and will send a copy of the complaint to the appointed investigating manager together with a request to:

1. Investigate, keeping relevant notes pursuant to the complaint.
2. Refer to internal or external agencies for guidance and support, as necessary. Especially with complaints related to equality and diversity, disability issues.
3. Ensure that the Quality and Systems Officer and the complainant is informed of any potential delay reaching a resolution, providing a reason for the delay.
4. Resolve the matter and inform the Quality and Systems Officer and the complainant of the outcomes of the investigation within ten working days of the start of the original written complaint being received by investigating manager.
5. The Quality and Systems Officer will confirm the outcomes to the complainant within fifteen days of the acknowledgement letter.

If the complaint relates to a member of staff, and it is "high risk" and there may be a case to answer, then the Investigating Manager should contact the HR Department immediately for advice before undertaking an investigation under the Employee Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Stage 2: Handling formal written complaints

If no resolution or copies of correspondence is received from the investigation manager after ten working days from the date when the written formal complaint was first received, the Quality and Systems Officer, or a nominated person will enquire further about the situation and progress being made. This process is repeated until a satisfactory resolution is reached or the complaint has been declared, with reasons, to be unjustified.

Any meetings with the complainant, records of conversations or other parties involved should be recorded in writing by the investigating manager. A copy of all correspondence and details pertaining to the complaint must be sent to the Quality and Systems Officer.

Outcomes of complaints and any resolution must be notified to the complainant in writing within fifteen working days.

If the complaint is unfounded, this must be relayed to the complainant by the investigating manager with suitable explanations.

If a mutually agreed resolution of the complaint cannot be reached, the matter can be referred for Appeal. Any letters of correspondence should refer to an appeal procedure to the Principal, LSBTC.

Stage 3: Appeal

In the event that a complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant based on non-compliance with the procedure, or based on significant (and substantiated) failings of the investigation itself, or new evidence to support the original complaint, they may appeal the decision through the Quality and Standards Officer. This appeal must be logged within 28 days, of the receipt of the original outcome, relating to the initial formal complaint. The appeal will be investigated by the Principal LSBTC or another member of the Senior Leadership Team. The appeal will review all documentation relating to the complaint and may also involve discussions with the complainant or others involved in the case before arising at a decision. If the original finding is upheld, this decision is final on behalf of the college and no further appeals will be permitted.

If a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, and they are an adult in receipt of Greater London Authority Funding, they can complain to the following address:

Provider complaints, Skills and Employment unit, Greater London Authority, 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL.

Or email: skillscomplaints@london.gov.uk.

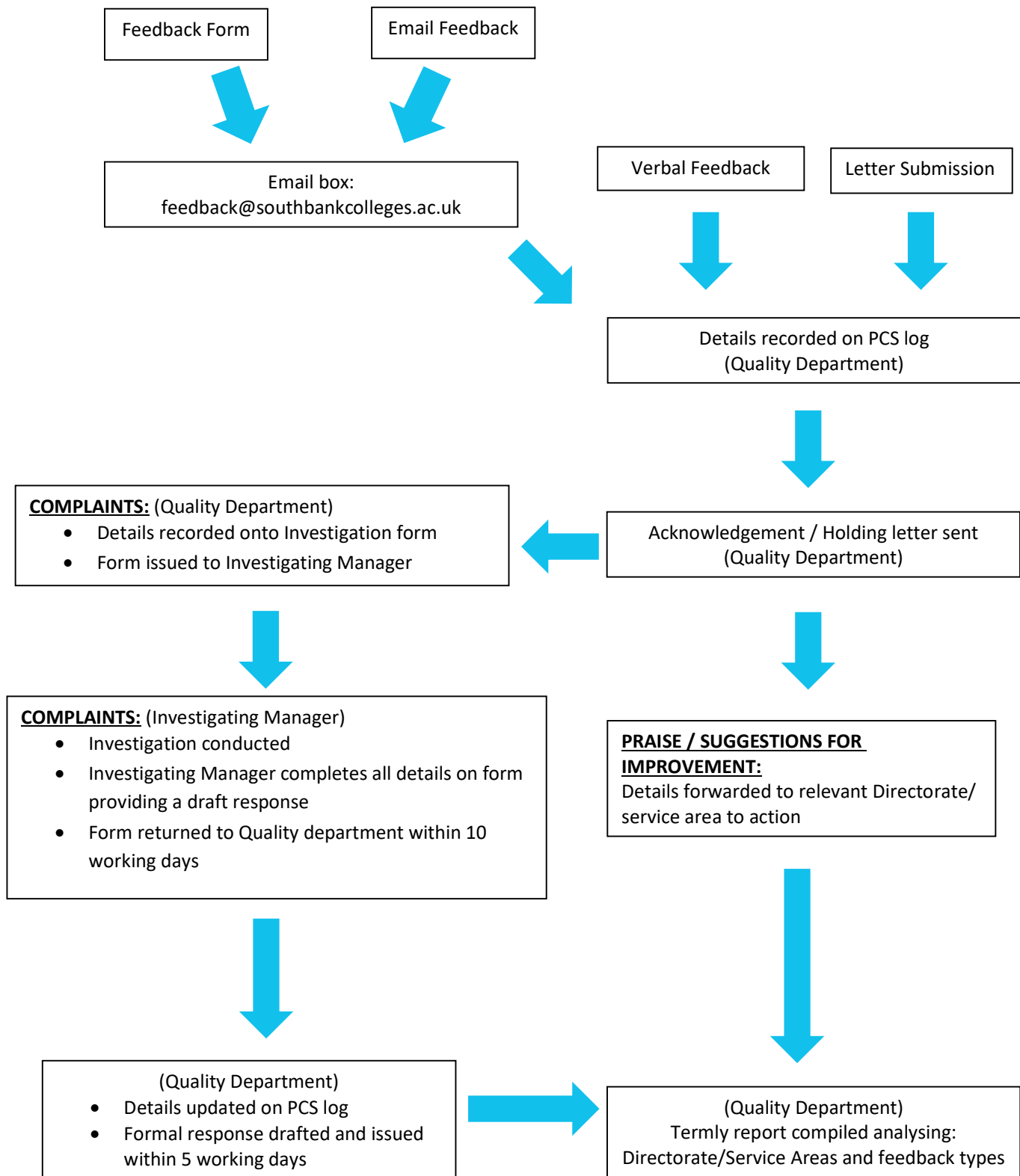
Please note that you must contact the GLA within 12 months after the issue happened.

For all other student complaints, please refer to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). This must take place within 12 months after the issue happened. Contact details for the ESFA are shown below:

ESFA complaints team:
complaints.ESFA@education.gov.uk
Complaints team
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
CV1 2WT, Coventry

For learners who are on a Higher National programme, having exhausted the college's internal procedures and subject to the provisions of legislation, they will have the right to request the Office of the Independent Adjudicator to review the relevant case. <http://oiahe.org.uk/>.

9. APPENDIX B Student/ Apprentice / Stakeholder Feedback



Praise Complaints Suggestions

South Bank Colleges are committed to providing an excellent service to its students, apprentices, their parents, employers, partners and the local community. We welcome all feedback on our services, including praise, complaints and suggestions. We would like to hear from you:

If you have praise to give:



If you have had a positive experience at the college, we would like to hear about it! Complete the back of this leaflet and let us know.

If you have a suggestion:



What can we do to improve your experience at South Bank Colleges?

If you have a complaint:



- First talk to a member of staff informally; the matter may be swiftly resolved.
- If you are not satisfied with the outcome, please complete the form on the back of this leaflet with as much detail as possible.
- Hand in the completed form at Reception or Student Services at any of the College centres.
- We undertake to give you a formal response within fifteen working days of receipt of your original written complaint.

You may also complete this form online or email: feedback@southbankcolleges.ac.uk

PRAISE / COMPLAINT / SUGGESTION FORM

TALK

BACK

Complaint

If you are making a complaint, please provide details below and send it to:
feedback@southbankcolleges.ac.uk

Nature of issue			
Date issue occurred			
Action taken to resolve the complaint informally in the first instance			
Name of who you tried to resolve the issue with informally in the first instance			
Details of why you wish to make this a formal complaint following unsuccessful resolution informally in the first instance			
Signature:		Date:	

Appeal

If you are making an appeal, please provide details below and send it to:
feedback@southbankcolleges.ac.uk

Complaint reference:			
I believe there was non-compliance with the complaints procedure	Please provide your reasons below:		
I believe there were significant and substantiated failings with the investigation	Please provide your reasons below:		
Signature:		Date:	

PRAISE / COMPLAINT / SUGGESTION FORM

TALK

BACK