Complaints Policy

2026-2029

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1 SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF POLICY

1.1 Stanmore College is committed to delivering an outstanding learning experience and supporting all learners to progress and succeed. Listening and responding effectively to complaints is a core mechanism for improvement, accountability, and assurance.

1.2 Stanmore College aims to provide a learning and working environment where learners and stakeholders can participate fully and raise concerns without fear of disadvantage. Complaints are a valuable source of intelligence and will be used to improve services, outcomes, and experiences.

1.3 This policy sets out Stanmore College's approach to:

- informal resolution and early intervention
- formal investigation, response timelines and records
- appeals and internal escalation
- external escalation routes where appropriate

1.4 This policy applies to all Stanmore College learners, applicants, parents/ carers, employers, visitors and stakeholders, across all provision.

1.5 Complaints that are more appropriately managed under HR processes (e.g., staff disciplinary/ grievance) may be transferred to HR; the complainant will be informed where this changes the handling route. Related policies and documents:

- Safeguarding and Prevent policy
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policy
- Learner Behaviour Policy
- Student Financial Support policy
- SEND policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Grievance policy

1.6 General enquiries, routine feedback, compliments and comments are not normally managed through this policy and should be directed to enquiries@stanmore.ac.uk or the relevant College

service area. This policy applies specifically to concerns or complaints requiring investigation or formal resolution.

2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

2.1 Stanmore College's Strategic Plan focuses on delivering high-quality education, strong learner outcomes, an inclusive environment, and effective governance. This Complaints Policy supports these objectives by:

- Improving the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and support through timely identification and resolution of issues raised by learners and stakeholders.
- Supporting learner success and progression by identifying barriers early and enabling appropriate intervention.
- Promoting an inclusive and supportive environment through accessible, fair and transparent processes for raising concerns.
- Strengthening accountability and continuous improvement by monitoring, analysing and reporting complaints to inform quality improvement and governance.

3 DEFINITIONS

Complaint: Any issue brought to the attention of the College that the complainant (learner, applicant, parent/ carer, employer, visitor, community member or other stakeholder) feels is unsatisfactory, unfair, or unacceptable.

Appeal: A request by the complainant for the outcome of a formal complaint to be reconsidered, on permitted grounds (new evidence, procedural error, or incomplete consideration of the complaint points).

Complainant: The person raising the complaint (or their representative where appropriate).

Working days: Monday-Friday during term time. Complaints received outside term time may take longer due to staff availability; this will be communicated.

4 RESPONSIBILITIES, OWNERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Policy Owner: Director of Teaching, Learning and Quality Improvement

The Quality Team is responsible for:

- maintaining clear processes to manage informal and formal complaints and appeals
- logging and tracking formal complaints and monitoring timescales
- acknowledging formal complaints and coordinating allocation of an Investigating Manager
- ensuring complainants are informed of:the complaints process and expected timescales
    - the outcome (or progress updates where delays occur)
    - next steps including appeal rights and external escalation routes
- producing periodic summary reporting to the Executive Leadership Team and Governors to support assurance and improvement
- ensuring the policy is accessible via the intranet and StudySpace, and referenced at induction

Investigating Manager responsibilities

- investigate fairly, objectively and proportionately
- gather evidence, meet relevant parties as required, and produce a written report/ outcome summary
- liaise with the Quality Team on progress, delays and draft responses

Executive Leadership Team responsibilities

- consider and determine appeals
- ensure final internal decisions are communicated clearly, with signposting to external routes where applicable

Safeguarding

- complaints raising safeguarding concerns are referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or Executive Director of People and Culture, as appropriate.

5 POLICY DEVELOPMENT

5.1 This policy reflects sector good practice and Stanmore College's operational needs. Feedback is welcomed from learners, staff and stakeholders. The policy and appendices will be reviewed in line with the review date and earlier, should changes to policy and process dictate.

6 POLICY LOCATION AND AWARENESS

6.1 The policy is available on the College Intranet and StudySpace. Learners are signposted at induction and reminded through tutorial/ pastoral systems. Staff guidance and templates are held by the Quality Team. Complaint forms can be found at the College reception.

7 INFORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE & EARLY RESOLUTION

7.1 Complaints will be handled fairly, promptly and confidentially. Learners will not be disadvantaged for raising concerns, and issues will be resolved at the lowest appropriate level wherever possible.

Principles

- resolve at the earliest point and lowest appropriate level
- prioritise learner welfare, fairness and timeliness
- manage and respond to complaints in a consistent manner
- use complaints as a mechanism for learning and improvement
- keep brief local records of actions/ outcomes where relevant

Process

1. Course issue: raise with Teacher first; if unresolved escalate to Curriculum Manager, then Director or Assistant Principal.
2. Teacher issue: if the issue relates to the teacher, raise the issue directly with the Curriculum Manager
3. Service issue (e.g., admissions, finance, facilities): raise with the service area manager.
4. If unresolved, the complainant may request escalation to a formal complaint via the Quality Team by emailing complaints@stanmore.ac.uk.

Timing expectations

- Informal concerns should normally be raised within 2 weeks of the event, except where there are exceptional circumstances.

- Anonymous informal complaints will not normally be progressed; however, they will be reviewed and may be investigated where the nature or seriousness of the concern warrants further action.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- The Quality Team will ensure that complaints are monitored for compliance with timescales and quality of response.
- The Quality Team maintains a central log of complaints.
- Data is analysed by e.g category, theme, faculty and learner group.
- Findings are reported to the Executive Leadership Team and Governors.
- Outcomes inform Quality Improvement Plans and service improvements.

8 FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

8.1 Where a formal complaint is received outside of term time, the standard complaints process will apply. However, timescales may be adjusted to reflect staff availability. In such cases, the complainant will be informed at the acknowledgement stage, or via an early progress update, if the investigation is likely to take longer due to staff absence, and a revised expected outcome date will be provided.

How to make a formal complaint

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of an informal resolution, or you do not feel able to raise your concern informally, you can make a formal complaint to the College.

Eligibility

Formal complaints should normally be submitted within 2 weeks of the event (unless exceptional circumstances apply).

What to include in your complaint

To help us investigate your complaint effectively, please provide as much detail as possible, including:

- Your name and contact details
- Your student ID number (if applicable)
- A clear description of the issue, including dates, times and locations
- The names of any staff or individuals involved (if known)

- Any supporting evidence (e.g. emails, letters, screenshots)
- What outcome or resolution you are seeking

If you require support to submit your complaint, you can speak to your Tutor, a member of staff, or the Quality Team, who will assist you.

9 Steps and timescales

1. **Submission**
   - Complaints may be submitted via:
     - Online enquiry form / website route
     - email to complaints@stanmore.ac.uk
     - complaint form via reception
     - verbal complaint that is requested to be treated as formal (logged by Quality Team)
2. **What happens next**
   - Quality Team assigns a reference number, category, and Investigating Manager.
   - Acknowledgement sent within 5 working days.
3. **Investigation**
   - Investigating Manager clarifies scope/ outcomes sought, gathers evidence, and consults relevant staff/ stakeholders/ records.
   - Where safeguarding is identified, safeguarding leads are informed immediately.
   - The Investigating Manager will produce a written summary/ report of findings and recommendations.
4. **Confidentiality and conduct**
   - Your complaint will be handled confidentially and only shared with staff involved in the investigation.
   - You will not be disadvantaged for making a complaint.
   - The College expects all communication to be respectful. Abusive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated.
5. **Anonymous complaints**

Anonymous informal complaints will not normally be progressed; however, they will be reviewed and may be investigated where the nature or seriousness of the concern warrants further action.

4. Outcome

- A written outcome is issued within **15 working days** of receipt **or** the complainant receives a progress update with a revised date (where complexity or staff availability requires it).
- Outcome includes appeal rights and the next steps.

Note: If the complaint is redirected to HR or another policy route, the formal complaints clock pauses and the complainant is informed of the alternative process and indicative timescales (as far as can be shared).

APPEALS PROCESS

Grounds for appeal

An appeal will only be considered where:

- not all complaint points were addressed, and/ or
- new evidence is available that could not reasonably have been provided earlier, and/ or
- a procedural error occurred that may have materially affected the outcome

Process and timescales

1. The complainant submits an appeal in writing within 10 working days of the formal outcome.
2. Quality Team acknowledges within 5 working days and assigns to an Executive Leadership Team reviewer (not previously involved).
3. Executive Leadership Team reviews and issues an appeal decision within 15 working days, or provides an update with revised timescales where needed.
4. The Executive Leadership Team decision is final and closes the College's internal process.

10 EXTERNAL ESCALATION ROUTES

10.1 Where internal processes are exhausted and dissatisfaction remains, complainants may escalate their complaint to an appropriate external agency. Complainants should note that external agencies will normally require evidence that the College's internal complaints procedure has been fully completed before considering a complaint.

Where applicable, complaints may be escalated to:

Department for Education (DfE) (FE funding complaints):

Access the Customer Help Portal - Customer Help Portal

Greater London Authority (GLA) (Adult Education Budget-funded learners): Skillscomplaints@london.gov.uk

Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) (HE learners, where applicable): www.oiahe.org.uk

Awarding organisation or regulator, where the complaint relates to the administration of an examination or qualification. Appeals relating to grades or marks must follow the relevant awarding organisation appeals procedures rather than this policy.