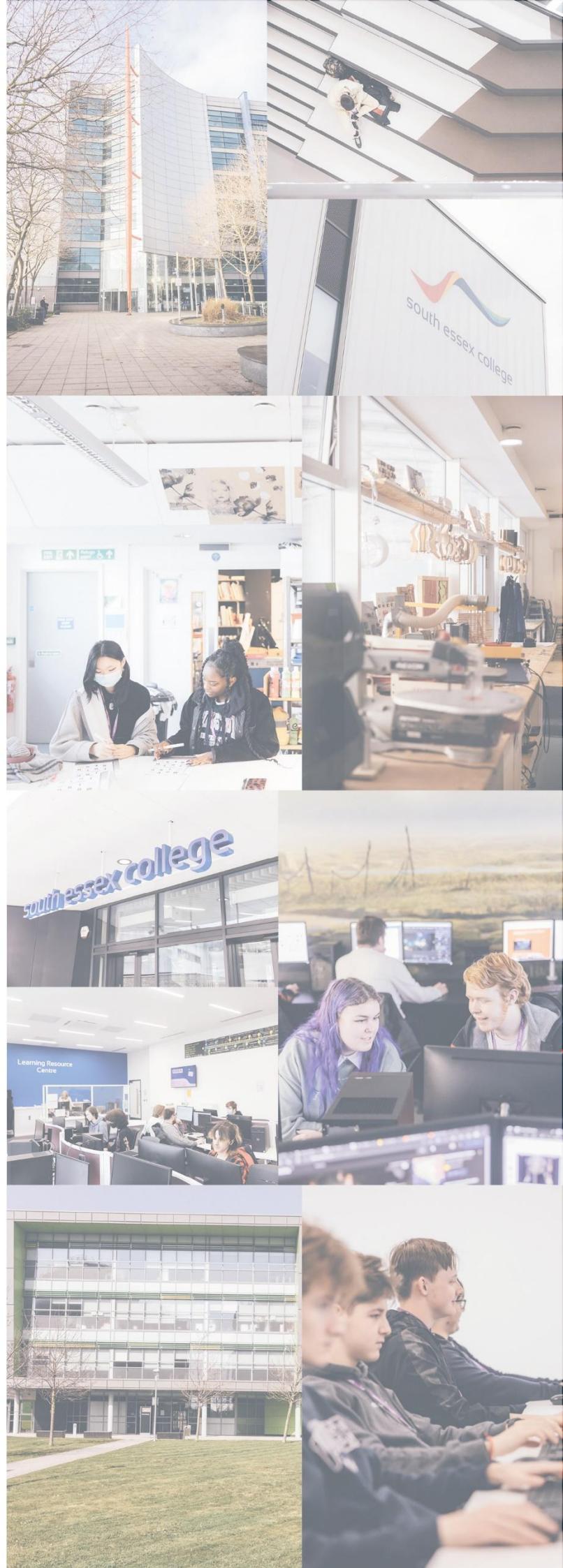


College Policy

Complaints and Compliments Policy (2025-26)

10th September 2025



| | |
|---|---|
| Senior Leadership Responsibility | Adam Fahey |
| Policy Author | Adam Fahey |
| Roles Responsible for Reviewing | Group Deputy Chief Executive Officer - Curriculum and Quality |
| Issue date of current version | 10-09-25 (25-26 V1) |
| Date to be reviewed | August 2026 |
| Type of Policy | Public |

Significant changes following review of Policy

| Page Number or Heading Name | Date of Change | Details of significant change | Changes made by |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--|------------------------|
| 9 | n/a | Point 5 added in relation to Compliments | L Stagg |
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Equality Impact Assessment

The aim of an equality impact assessment (EIA) is to consider the equality implications of any new or amended policy, procedure, practice, project, function on different groups of staff, students and visitors to the college. This EIA tool provides a simple framework that helps evaluate whether the change may inadvertently disadvantage protected characteristics and identify ways to proactively advance and promote equality.

You will need to consider each of the equations and provide information as to consideration and any changes made in relation to Equality, diversity and inclusion.

| | |
|---|---|
| Date EIA completed. | 10.09.25 |
| Name of person responsible for completing the EIA | Matthew Twitchett |
| Role of person responsible for completing the EIA | Executive Director of Quality, Teaching and Learning |
| Who is affected by the policy / decision / change | Students and Staff employed |
| What's the reason for the new policy / change in policy, practice, process etc. | This is a yearly review and update required by awarding organisations |

You will need to consider whether it's possible that the proposed new policy / change in policy /procedure/practice etc could discriminate or unfairly discriminate or disadvantage people. You should consider:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Who gets to participate | Who does not, or who now does not due to the changes proposed / made. |
| Who is at an advantage | Who is at a disadvantage, and again has this changed? |
| Who will benefit | Who will not benefit (or who did and now doesn't due to the changes proposed in policy) |
| Who can access the policy | Who cannot, or now cannot. |

| Protected Characteristic | What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with one being lowest impact and 5 being the highest) | What is a potential positive, neutral or negative impact? Include what you have considered. Are there any barriers? | What action will be taken to address any negative impact or remove any potential barriers identified? Note if we are not able to resolve anything identified. | Date by when and whom will this action be taken. |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Age | 1 | None identified | | |
| Disability | 1 | Some students may need support in understanding the policy and help in raising a complaint or compliment . This support will be provided by the student support teams in the College. | Students with an identified disability can seek support from a Carer/Parent or Guardian and the College in raising a complaint or compliment | As and when required |
| Gender (Sex) | 1 | None identified | | |
| Gender Reassignment | 1 | None identified | | |
| Marriage or Civil Partnership | 1 | None identified | | |

| Protected Characteristic | What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with one being lowest impact and 5 being the highest) | What is a potential positive, neutral or negative impact? Include what you have considered. Are there any barriers? | What action will be taken to address any negative impact or remove any potential barriers identified? Note if we are not able to resolve anything identified. | Date by when and whom will this action be taken. |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Pregnancy / Maternity | 1 | A student may not be able to complete a complaint during pregnancy or maternity leave. Support and guidance will be provided to the student in this case to mitigate any negative impact. | If a complaint is received outside the time frames this will be considered and extra time allowed for the complaint to be considered.. | As and when required |
| Race | 1 | | | |
| Religion or Religious Belief | 1 | Time frames for a student to lodge a complaint could be affected by religious holidays. | Students should consider how a religious holiday could impact on any complaint. The College will accept a complaint if a student is impacted by a religious holiday and provides evidence. | College will respond to student within 2 working days |
| Sexual Orientation | 1 | None identified | | |
| Any other element that needs to be considered. | 1 | None identified | | |

Note:

1. The terms stated under protected characteristics are the terminology used in the Equality Act 2010.
2. As part of the policy approval process Executive Board will consider the EIA assessment and any potential barriers which we may not be able to overcome and whether the action proposed will mitigate sufficiently within legislation or whether we decide to not implement the new policy if the risk are significant. If the policy is approved the EIA is also approved

1. Introduction

1.1 South Essex Colleges Group (SECG) is a community of professionals who inspire learners to be extraordinary in all they do. We encourage not only our learners to perform to the peak of ability but ourselves. As part of that ethos we encourage constructive criticism from all our stakeholders in order to ensure that the high standards we set ourselves are maintained.

2. Scope

2.1 A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction by a stakeholder about a provider's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider.

2.2 The task of actioning and monitoring complaints and compliments will sit with College Principals and their Deputies or Heads of Service as appropriate and with the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality. The Quality Executive Board will monitor complaints and compliments on a monthly basis and will report to the CQC Governors committee.

3. Intent

3.1 This policy seeks:

- To establish a clear process for the logging, tracking and monitoring complaints and compliments.
- To provide guidance for staff, learners and any stakeholder who is dissatisfied with South Essex Colleges Group's performance through action or inaction.
- To ensure that SECG responds swiftly to any issues raised and that the complainant is kept fully informed of progress.
- To resolve complaints as swiftly as possible through mediation and facilitated discussions.
- To reduce the number of formal investigations.
- To produce accurate College-based data regarding complaints, response and resolution.

4. Implementation

4.1 SECG must be informed of any issue as soon as possible and within 20 working days on any alleged incident.

4.2 A complaint can be logged:

- by e-mail by contacting the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality at Yoursay@southessex.ac.uk.
- on the SECG website via the compliments and complaints form.

4.3 Any complaint which is not received through the above channels ie by letter or e mail to a member of staff must be referred, as soon as possible, to the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality for logging and response allocation.

4.4 No complaint is to be responded to locally without referral to the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality.

4.5 Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within 2 working days and will inform the relevant Head of Service, College Principal or their Deputy. If the complaint is received in a college closure period then investigations will take place once the college fully re-opens for business.

4.6 The Head of Service, College Principal or their Deputy will contact the complainant within 2 working days to introduce themselves and offer a meeting to resolve the issue. Initial contact and the proposed meeting may include:

- Gaining information about the concern or complaint
- Providing information or context to a complainant
- Suggesting various solutions including arranging a facilitated discussion
- Giving an apology where it seems appropriate to do so, although advice must always be sought before issuing an apology to allay any concerns with regards to legal liability
- Confirming resolution or next steps

4.7 A facilitated discussion may involve any other member of staff as determined by the Head of Service, College Principal or their Deputy and will be minuted.

4.8 If the facilitated discussion resolves the issues raised, the Head of Service, College Principal or their Deputy will inform the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality; the complaint will be closed down and a letter or e mail sent to the complainant within 5 working days to confirm the resolution and any recommendations which arise as a result.

4.9 If the mediation is refused or does not resolve the issues, the formal investigation process will commence.

4.10 The Executive Assistant will inform the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality of the outcome and SLT will appoint an Investigating Manager (IM) unconnected to the area which is subject to the complaint in order to ensure impartiality.

4.11 The IM will make contact with the complainant within 2 working days to introduce themselves and arrange a face to face or phone conversation to confirm the key points raised in the complaint. The IM must outline to the complainant any evidence that they will require as part of the investigation and complete the investigation within 15 working days of making contact with the complainant.

4.12 The IM will interview involved parties and review documents and communication records in order to gather evidence before submitting a report and recommendations

based on their findings to the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality.

4.13 All complaint investigations must be signed off on completion by the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality or his proxy prior to communication with the complainant.

4.14 The IM will write to the complainant informing them of the outcome and any recommendations that are appropriate to share within 15 working days. If the complaint is not upheld or partially upheld, the reasons for this should be outlined in the letter. The outcome letter should also include the next steps, should the complainant be unsatisfied with the outcome. Prior to sending the formal communication, the IM will contact the complainant in person or via phone to brief them of the outcome.

4.15 The IM will ensure that the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality is provided with a completed report, all appropriate and relevant evidence and a copy of the response communication to the complainant within 2 working days of closing the process.

4.16 The Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality will inform the College Principal or Head of Service of the resolution of the complaint and any follow up action. This may involve referral to Human Resources Department.

4.17 Complaints will be classified, logged and tracked in four categories:

- **Upheld:** the complaint was justified and will result in the appropriate action to improve SECG practice
- **Partially upheld:** aspects of the complaint were justified and will result in the appropriate action to improve SECG practice
- **Not upheld:** the complaint was not justified but may result in actions which improve SECG practice
- **Withdrawn:** the complaint was withdrawn by the complainant

4.18 If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal investigation, they can request a review or submit an appeal. This may include but is not limited to:

- A review of the procedures followed at the formal investigation
- A consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable
- New material evidence which the complainant was unable to, for valid reasons, provide earlier in the process

An appeal will not usually consider the issues afresh or involve a further investigation. A request setting out the grounds for an appeal must be submitted in writing to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality at Yoursay@southsessex.ac.uk.

4.19 The Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality will acknowledge the appeal request within 2 working days and a different IM will be appointed by SLT.

4.20 The IM will contact the complainant by phone within 2 working days to introduce themselves, to determine the key points of the appeal and to ensure that the complainant understands the scope of the appeal process.

4.21 The IM must complete their review in 15 working days and consider these key questions as part of the process:

- Were the required procedures followed during the formal stage?
- Was the outcome reasonable in the circumstances?
- Has the complainant received clear reasons why the complaint was rejected at the formal stage?
- If new material evidence has been provided, has the complainant given valid reasons for not supplying this earlier?

4.22 The IM must communicate the outcome of the appeal to the complainant in writing and provide the Executive Assistant to the Group Deputy CEO – Curriculum and Quality with all appropriate and relevant evidence within 15 working days.

4.23 If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome after an appeal investigation has been conducted, they may contact The Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ministerial and Public Communications Division, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Stone Street, Manchester, M1 2WD (students aged 14 - 19 OR 14 – 25 if there are learning difficulties)

In the case of a serial or vexatious complainant, SECG reserves the right to refuse to investigate a complaint and may, if appropriate, refer the matter to solicitors. Examples of such cases may include but are not restricted to:

- Complaints which are harassing, obsessive or repetitive
- Insistence on pursuing non-meritorious complaints and unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes
- Insistence on pursuing what may be meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value

4.24 SECG reserves the right to withdraw from investigating a complaint if there is no response or communication from the complainant or other relevant parties after 15 working days. The complainant will be contacted a maximum of three times before being informed in writing that due to continued lack of response the complaint is no longer being processed.

4.25 All complaint paperwork and personal details linked to these complaints are treated as sensitive and kept in a secure Teams bucket accessible only by those relevant. Any complaints which lead to disciplinary action will be maintained by HR. All complaints documentation will be kept in line with GDPR retention timeframes.

5. Compliments

South Essex Colleges Group also welcomes compliments. Whether they relate to individuals, departments or campuses all compliments will be logged and forwarded to the relevant College Principal who will share with the appropriate staff.