



Higher Education Compliments and Complaints Policy

September 2025

SLT Responsibility - Adam Fahey

Policy Author - Sharon Dunphy



SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FOLLOWING REVIEW

PAGE NUMBER OR HEADING NAME	DETAILS OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	CHANGES MADE BY
All	Clarity of information regarding academic and non-academic complaints and which policy needs to be followed for the different awarding organisations	Sharon Dunphy

Senior Leadership Responsibility	Adam Fahey
Policy Author	Sharon Dunphy
Roles Responsible for Reviewing	Deputy Executive Director HE and Quality
Issue date of current version	September 2025 (V2)
Date to be reviewed	October 2026
Type of Policy	Public / Internal

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.	September 2025
Name of person responsible for completing the EIA	Sharon Dunphy
Role of person responsible for completing the EIA	Deputy Executive Director HE and Quality
Who is affected by the policy / decision / change	Student, Staff, Visitors and External Partners
What's the reason for the new policy / change in policy, practice, process etc.	Annual update of policy

You will need to consider whether its 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.

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Protected Characteristic	What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with 1 the lowest and 5 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	Neutral	None identified policy available in accessible formats	N/A
Disability	3	Neutral	Provide additional support for complainants needing assistance	N/A
Gender (Sex)	1	Neutral	None Identified	N/A
Gender Reassignment	1	Neutral	None Identified	N/A
Marriage or Civil Partnership	1	Neutral	None Identified	N/A
Pregnancy / Maternity	1	Neutral	None Identified	N/A
Race	1	Neutral	None Identified	N/A
Religion or Religious Belief	1	Neutral	None Identified	N/A
Sexual Orientation	1	Neutral	None Identified	N/A
Any other element that needs to be considered.	1	Neutral	None Identified	N/A

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.

Introduction:

University Centre South Essex 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

Scope:

This Policy applies to students studying on higher education programmes. Please see below for further details on which policy you should follow for Non-Academic or Academic Complaints by Validating Partner.

1. **Programmes Validated by The Open University**
 - **Non-Academic Complaints:** Covered by this policy.
 - **Academic Complaints:** Students should refer to The Open University section on the website for guidance. [HE Policies, Procedures and Downloads | South Essex College](#)
2. **Programmes Validated by The University of East Anglia (UEA)**
 - **Non-Academic Complaints:** Covered by this policy.
 - **Academic Complaints:** Students should refer to The University of East Anglia section on the website for guidance. [HE Policies, Procedures and Downloads | South Essex College](#)
3. **Programmes Validated by University of the Arts London (UAL)**
 - **Academic and Non-Academic Complaints:** Covered by this policy.
4. **All Other Higher Education Provision**
 - **Academic and Non-Academic Complaints:** Covered by this policy.

Complaints Categories and Examples:

Academic Complaints:

- Quality of Teaching or Learning: Issues with lectures, seminars, or educational services.
- Assessment and Feedback: Disputes over exam results, grades, or feedback delays.
- Course Content or Structure: Issues with curriculum, materials, or course changes.
- Academic Support: Concerns about access to tutors.

Non-Academic Complaints:

- Facilities or Resources: Issues with libraries, IT, accommodation, or study spaces.
- Administrative Services: Complaints about processing delays or errors in administrative tasks.
- Welfare and Support Services: Complaints regarding counselling, careers advice, etc.

- **Financial Issues:** Disputes regarding fees, refunds, or financial aid.

Implementation

This policy will be published on the College website and communicated to all staff.

General Roles and Responsibilities

- All College staff have a responsibility for receiving compliments, suggestions and complaints, treating them seriously and dealing with them promptly and courteously in accordance with the policy.
- The Deputy Executive Director – Higher Education and Quality is responsible for resolving complaints on behalf of University Centre South Essex. They may appoint a Manager to investigate and respond on their behalf but will maintain overall responsibility.
- The Customer Services Officer coordinates the Compliments and Complaints process. They also provide support and guidance on all matters relating to this Policy.

Procedure for logging a complaint

The Executive Assistant to the Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer (DGCEO) is responsible for logging all complaints

- A complaint can be made either via:
 1. email to Yoursay@southessex.ac.uk
 2. the online compliments and complaints form via [Contact us | South Essex College](#)

Complaints Procedure

Informal Complaint - If there is concern about an aspect of a course, or any of the College's services, it is recommended that you speak to your tutor, programme leader or a member of the HE support team. If other students share the concerns then the student course representative should be approached.

If the issue cannot be resolved within the Department/Team a formal complaint can be made following the procedure for logging a complaint, as above.

The Executive Assistant DGCEO will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within 2 working days and will inform the investigating manager.

The investigation manager (Member of Executive Board/Deputy Executive Director Higher Education/ Programme Partnership Manager) 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

Appealing the outcome of a complaint decision

If a complaint is not resolved using the complaints policy there is the right to appeal. Please see below information for the next step.

Students enrolled under the University of Art London (UAL) Higher education programmes:

Once the college appeal stage has been completed students can request a final Stage Review with UAL by emailing complaints@arts.ac.uk.

Students enrolled under The University of East Anglia (UEA), The Open University (OU) or other higher education programmes:

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 Deputy Group CEO at Yoursay@southessex.ac.uk

The Executive Assistant of the Deputy Group CEO will acknowledge the appeal request within 2 working days and a different investigating manager (IM) will be appointed by the Senior Leadership Team.

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.

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?

Student enrolled on The University of East Anglia (UEA), The Open University (OU) all other higher education programmes excluding University Arts London (UAL):

Once the appeal/review against complaint outcome stages have been completed, you are entitled to ask the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#), the independent ombudsman service of last resort, to look at your complaint. All applications to the OIA must be made within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter issued by the College or Validating University to the student. The OIA considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of the complaints procedure. The OIA looks at issues such as whether the College followed its policy, and whether the final decision was reasonable in all the circumstances. The OIA cannot normally look at complaints:

- where the student has not progressed through all stages of the complaints process
- where the complaint refers to matters more than three years old
- where the Completion of Procedures letter is received outside the twelve month time limit
- Where matters have been or are being considered in court.

Full details of the scheme are available at www.oiahe.org.uk.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The College will keep a log of all compliments and complaints. In order to secure ongoing improvement, the overall process will be monitored for consistency, quality of response and compliance with policy.

Information with regards to the number of complaints received/resolved/not resolved may be shared with our validating partners for reporting and monitoring purposes.

Personal data will be handled according to the General Data Protection Regulation 2018. For further information in regards to Data Privacy and GDPR, please see our website on the following link: <https://www.southessex.ac.uk/gdpr>





Any questions or more information?
Email: sharon.dunphy@southessex.ac.uk

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