



education
training
collective

Policy:

Complaints and Compliments

Date approved:	November 2025		Review Date:	November 2026	
Approved by:	FE Corporation				
Relevant to (please <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bede	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Innersummit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NETA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RCC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SRC
Signed (Lead Manager):	Cath Turner				
Print Name:	Cath Turner				

1. PURPOSE

This document sets out the group's policy and advice to learners, employers and other stakeholders on how to raise concerns about courses and/or other services provided by the group. The group is made up of Bede Sixth Form, Innersummit, NETA, Redcar and Cleveland College and Stockton Riverside College. This policy details how complaints will be investigated and the group's approach in trying to resolve any concerns as early as possible via an informal route.

In addition to concerns and complaints, the group also welcomes and values compliments, which help to recognise good practice, celebrate success, and inform continuous improvement across all services.

2. SCOPE

This policy covers all users of group services. If a complaint relates to provision provided by a subcontractor of the group or by an organisation offering services to learners (e.g. a placement provider); the complainant should raise their complaint with that organisation in the first instance and advise a relevant manager within the group of the focus of the complaint so any necessary immediate group actions can be considered. If the complainant remains unhappy following the response from the other organisation, then they should progress their complaint under the formal stage of this policy.

Complaints from staff that primarily relate to employment related issues will be dealt with under the group Grievance Policy. In case of any query as to whom the grievance should be directed to, please contact the group Head of Human Resources.

This policy also makes provision for the recording and acknowledgement of compliments, which are welcomed from all service users.

3. STATEMENT OF ACTION

A range of methods are available to learners to enable them to provide feedback to the group on the service they are receiving. This includes learner surveys and focus groups. Complaint QR codes linking to a Microsoft Form are available to learners, parents and visitors at reception areas at all group sites. Alternatively, an email can be sent (section 2 Procedure). All feedback will be used as appropriate in group Business Planning, Quarterly Review, Self-Assessment and improvement planning processes.

Complaints will be reviewed and presented to the Senior Management Team (SMT) every half term. This process will ensure ongoing monitoring and enable the SMT to identify recurring issues or group themes, track progress and ensure that concerns are being addressed promptly and appropriately, fostering continuous improvement and responsiveness within the group.

Compliments received through these methods will also be recorded and shared, where appropriate, to recognise good practice and celebrate success across the group.

4. LINKED POLICIES

- Appeal Against an Assessment Decision.
- Assessment of Course Work.
- Conflicts of Interest in Assessment, Verification and Examination Practice.
- Grievance.
- Internal and External Verification.

5. RETENTION OF COMPLAINT OR COMPLIMENT INFORMATION

Information will be retained in line with appropriate legislation and business requirements. The group will retain records of formal complaints for a period of three academic years from the date of resolution or closure.

Records will include details of the complaint, the investigation process, outcomes, and any actions taken because of the complaint. Persons will have access to specific information which are part of a retained record.

The Head Executive and Curriculum Administration Services will be responsible for overseeing the retention of complaint records, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations.

After the three-year retention period, records will be securely disposed of in accordance with data protection guidelines.

The retention period may be extended if required by legal or regulatory obligations.

Compliments may also be recorded for internal purposes and retained in accordance with relevant data protection and retention policies.

6. LOCATION AND ACCESS

This policy is located on the group Gateway and website.



Procedure:

Complaints and Compliments

COMPLAINTS

The group recognises the importance of listening to and addressing complaints.

Feedback in the form of concerns or complaints from learners, parents/carers, employers, stakeholders, or members of the public is vital for identifying areas for improvement, ensuring accountability, and maintaining high standards across the group. Complaints are taken seriously and are viewed as opportunities to learn, adapt, and strengthen the quality of service and provision offered.

1. Informal stage

The complainant should first discuss the matter with the most appropriate person. This may be their lecturer/teacher or the course leader; or the person providing the service (e.g. a member of the information and guidance team).

The person receiving the complaint will endeavour to resolve the complaint in a timely, fair and objective manner and report the outcome to the complainant.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome the issue should be escalated to the most appropriate manager (e.g. responsible for the area of service) who will investigate and endeavour to resolve the complaint as quickly as possible. To do this the manager will contact the complainant, acknowledge they have understood the complaint, and communicate the outcome of their dealing of the complaint to the complainant. If the complainant is unsure who the most relevant manager is they should be advised to enquire at Reception or contact the Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services by phone on 01642 865401 or by email at catherine.turner@the-etc.ac.uk. If the complainant is still dissatisfied at the conclusion of this informal stage the manager must provide them with information and advice regarding the formal complaint process, including timescales, and a copy of the complaint.

2. Formal stage

All formal complaints relating to a programme of study must be made within three calendar months of the official notification of the outcome of a learner's course or within six months of a learner's recorded leaving date. All other formal complaints must be made within three calendar months of the issue/s occurrence that are the focus of the complaint. In considering the outcome of a complaint, the time taken to initiate the complaint may be considered especially where it is deemed that there has been an unreasonable delay in making the complaint.

For the purposes of processing personal information, the group is a data controller. Confidentiality will be respected, and all issues will be heard and dealt with through a transparent and accessible process which complies with the Data Protection Act 2018. No per-

son will be disadvantaged because they have complained. If a student or service user complains about another student or service user, the complainant's identity won't be disclosed by any member of staff dealing with the complaint.

If a complainant considers him or herself to have a disability and informs the group that they need support to make a complaint, the group will offer reasonable support and make reasonable adjustments to the process to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in bringing their complaint.

Complaints will be accepted from learners; from a parent or carer if the learner is under 18 years of age (or the learner is under 25 years of age and in receipt of an Education and Health Care Plan and/or high needs funding); or from other persons or organisations that have a direct relationship with the group (e.g. the employer of a group Apprentice). Complaints from third parties will not normally be accepted unless submitted on behalf of a learner under 18 years of age or a learner under 25 years of age and in receipt of an Education and Health Care Plan and/or high needs funding. The decision whether to pursue an anonymous complaint will be taken by the College Principal responsible for the area or site in which the complaint originated:

- Bede College Principal.
- NETA Director.
- Redcar College Principal.
- Stockton College Principal.
- Support service Senior Management Team lead.

Anonymous complaints may not be investigated where there isn't enough information contained in the complaint for the investigation to be meaningful or for some other substantial reason.

The complainant may be accompanied at any meetings by a supporter who is not acting in a legal capacity. Any complaint involving legal representation will be dealt with through the group's legal representatives.


Complaints will be collated via email, postal address, or through a Microsoft Form. Contact details and a link to QR codes for the form are available below and can also be accessed from Reception at all group sites. If needed, a request can be made for a physical copy of the form to be posted to any potential complainant who is based off-site.

Complaints should be forwarded to the Senior Administrator (Executive and Curriculum Administration Services) or Commercial Operations and Compliance Manager (NETA) based in the area or site in which the complaint originated:

<p>Senior Administrator Bede Sixth Form Marsh House Avenue Billingham Stockton on Tees TS23 3HB elizabeth.eddy@stockton.ac.uk</p>	<p>Bede Complaint Form</p> 
<p>Innersummit c/o Senior Administrator Bede Sixth Form Marsh House Avenue Billingham Stockton on Tees TS23 3HB elizabeth.eddy@stockton.ac.uk</p>	<p>Innersummit Complaint Form</p> 
<p>Commercial Operations and Compliance Manager NETA Pennine Avenue North Tees Industrial Estate Portrack Lane Stockton on Tees TS18 2RJ sian.cameron@NETA.co.uk</p>	<p>NETA Training Complaint Form</p> 
<p>Senior Administrator Redcar and Cleveland College Corporation Road Redcar TS10 1EZ helen.carter-smith@redcar.ac.uk</p>	<p>Redcar and Cleveland College Complaint Form</p> 

Sports Centre c/o Senior Administrator Bede Sixth Form Marsh House Avenue Billingham Stockton on Tees TS23 3HB elizabeth.eddy@stockton.ac.uk	
Senior Administrator Stockton Riverside College Harvard Avenue Stockton on Tees TS17 6FB alison.knapton@stockton.ac.uk	

Group complaints, or any involving multiple areas, must be forwarded directly to the Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services:

Education Training Collective Harvard Avenue Thornaby Stockton-on-Tees TS17 6FB catherine.turner@the-etc.ac.uk	
---	--

The Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services/Senior Administrator/Commercial Operations and Compliance Manager will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days and instigate an appropriate investigation with the relevant College Principal who will identify an Investigation Officer. At all stages of the investigation process the College Principal will follow group guidelines for Investigating Officers (see Appendix 1). A working day is Monday to Friday during normal term time.

The Investigating Officer will introduce themselves to the complainant as the investigating officer, acknowledge the complaint, and, in conjunction with the complainant, clarify the specifics of the complaint that the complainant would like an outcome communicated on. On conclusion of the investigation, they will respond in writing to the complainant, normally within 15 working days of the complaint being received, to notify the outcome. Where

complaints are of a particularly complex nature and the timeframe for investigation needs to be extended beyond 15 days, the Investigating Officer will provide regular updates to the complainant, normally every 15 working days.

Written records of the investigation will be saved by the Investigating Officer in the designated secure location. The integrity of any organisation's complaints policy, and the trust it should engender in complainants, relies on its commitment to confidentiality. All content within a complaint will be deemed highly confidential by default. Legislation may require the group to disclose some content, but the group will always endeavour to prioritise our duty under the data protection legislation to securely process personal information and apply appropriate exemptions to disclosure. Details noted will include whether a complaint was justified and/or any implications for working practices. Complaint outcomes will be communicated by the Investigating Officer to relevant group managers and any individual member of staff specifically mentioned by name in the complaint. Any actions arising from the complaint will be implemented in a timely way by the relevant manager and monitored through the group Quarterly Review process. Records of all formal complaints, including details of the investigation and outcome, will be maintained centrally by the Executive and Curriculum Administration team.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response they can appeal in writing, within 15 working days of the date of the complaint outcome letter, to the Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services by email to catherine.turner@the-etc.ac.uk or by post to:

Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services
Education Training Collective
Harvard Avenue
Thornaby
Stockton-on-Tees
TS17 6FB

The appeal will be dealt with by an appropriate member of the group Senior Management Team who will acknowledge receipt within five working days of the appeal being received. The Senior Management Team member will conduct a review and reply to the complainant in writing within 15 working days of the appeal being received. This, Completion of Procedures letter, will be the final group response. Please note that for the purposes of this policy, an appeal is defined as a request by a complainant for a formal review of the outcome of a complaints decision. The complainant may appeal a decision regarding the outcome of the complaint, if the complainant feels that the complaint was not considered in accordance with the group's Complaints Policy, that the decision did not take account of the available evidence or was unreasonable, given the evidence available. In making an application for an appeal, the complainant must state on which of these grounds the appeal is being made.

The Completion of Procedures letter will summarise the complaint/outline the issues that have been considered in addition to stating the final group decision and the reasons for the decision. The letter will include information to enable a complainant to progress their complaint further where they are unwilling to accept the group decision. This information will include the relevant Awarding Body and other appropriate bodies (e.g. the Department for Education or the Office for Students) where appropriate and relevant to the nature of the individual complaint.

Complainants whose complaint relates to a Higher Education (HE) programme/s may be directed to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education where appropriate. Where the complaint relates to HE provision leading to Awards of Teesside University, complainants will usually be directed to progress their complaint initially via the Teesside University complaints process.

Completion of Procedures letters for complaints regarding HE provision will explain the role of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, including its remit as an independent review scheme. It will also detail any factors it is important for a complainant to consider when deciding on timescales for further pursuing a complaint (e.g. discontinuation of a programme/module that would make the remedy they are seeking impossible to implement after a certain date) and the time limits (at the time of the Completion of Procedures letter) for raising a complaint with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

3. Complaints against Corporation or a member of Corporation (the group Governing Body)

A complaint against the Corporation, a member of the Corporation or the group Director of Governance may be made by an individual, business or an organisation. The decision whether to pursue an anonymous complaint will be taken by the group Director of Governance after consultation with the Chair or Vice Chair of the Corporation as appropriate. A decision may be taken not to investigate an anonymous complaint where there is insufficient information contained in the complaint for the investigation to be meaningful or for some other substantial reason. Please note all complaints against staff members of the Corporation, except the Chief Executive and Group Principal, will be dealt with under the process outlined in section 2 of this policy. (Complaints against the Chief Executive and Group Principal, as with all employees at the group, will be dealt with under the process outlined in the Scope and Procedure sections of this policy.)

Complaints against the Corporation or a member of the Corporation should be made in writing and sent to the group Director of Governance by email to sarah.thompson@the-etc.ac.uk or by post to:

Group Director of Governance
Education Training Collective

Harvard Avenue
Thornaby
Stockton-on-Tees
TS17 6FB

The complainant will be expected to state clearly the nature of the complaint and if appropriate provide copies of any related documentation.

The group Director of Governance will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days.
- Provide a response to the complaint within ten working days or if this is not possible.
- Provide the complainant with an interim statement.

The written response of the group Director of Governance will include details of any arrangements for pursuing the matter with an independent body (e.g. the Department for Education) as appropriate.

The group Director of Governance will keep the Chair of the Corporation informed of the situation (unless the Chair is the subject of the complaint, in which case the Clerk will liaise with the Vice Chair of the Corporation) and for complaints relating to the Corporation in general, will provide the Corporation with a written statement of the nature of the complaint and the response at the next Corporation meeting. Such a report shall be circulated to members within ten working days of the response of the group Director of Governance to the complaint, so that members are apprised of the situation.

The group Director of Governance and the Chair of the Corporation (or Vice Chair where appropriate) will jointly decide what information (taking advice from other relevant agencies and/or the Board Level Lead for Safeguarding where appropriate) will be shared with the Corporation when the complaint relates to an individual member of the Corporation. This will be especially applicable for any allegations that are related to safeguarding issues.

When carrying out an investigation in response to a complaint against the Corporation or an individual member of the Corporation, the group Director of Governance will have the authority to refer issues to the Corporation's auditors (external and/or internal) or other appropriate advisers, as appropriate.

A complaint against the group Director of Governance shall be forwarded to the Chair of the Corporation for investigation and response. Letters for the attention of the Chair of the Corporation to be addressed to the Chair of the Corporation:

Education Training College
Harvard Avenue

Thornaby
Stockton-on-Tees
TS17 6FB

The approach to be adopted by the Chair of the Corporation in investigating and responding to a complaint will be like that outlined above, with regard to complaints against the Corporation and individual members of the Corporation.

COMPLIMENTS

The group recognises the importance of acknowledging and celebrating positive feedback. Compliments from learners, parents/carers, employers, stakeholders or members of the public play a valuable role in affirming excellent practice, boosting staff morale, and sharing what works well across the group.

A compliment is defined as any form of positive feedback that acknowledges a person, team, service, or aspect of provision that has exceeded expectations or delivered a particularly high standard of support, teaching, or customer care.

1. Informal compliments

Where an individual wishes to express a compliment informally, they may do so directly to the relevant member of staff or service area. Informal compliments are always welcome and will be received positively and acknowledged appropriately.

Where informal compliments are received by front-line staff, they are encouraged to forward the feedback to their line manager to ensure the good practice can be recognised, shared, and where appropriate, celebrated more widely.

2. Formal compliments

Formal compliments can be submitted by any individual or organisation who has had direct interaction with the group, including but not limited to:

- Current or former learners.
- Parents/carers of learners (particularly where learners are under 18 or are in receipt of an Education and Health Care Plan and/or high needs funding).
- Employers of Apprentices.
- External visitors or stakeholders.
- Members of the public with whom the group has engaged.

Formal compliments may be submitted:


- Via the Microsoft Form used for group feedback (QR codes and links available below and at Reception at all sites).
- In writing via email or post to the relevant Senior Administrator or Commercial Operations and Compliance Manager (NETA) (details below).

- Verbally, where they will be noted and forwarded by staff on behalf of the individual, with permission.

All formal compliments will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt.


Compliments should be directed to the relevant Senior Administrator based on the site or area of provision to which the compliment relates:

<p>Senior Administrator Bede Sixth Form Marsh House Avenue Stockton on Tees Billingham TS23 2HB elizabeth.eddy@stockton.ac.uk</p>	
<p>Innersummit c/o Senior Administrator Bede Sixth Form Marsh House Avenue Stockton on Tees Billingham TS23 2HB elizabeth.eddy@stockton.ac.uk</p>	
<p>Commercial Operations and Compliance Manager NETA Pennine Avenue North Tees Industrial Estate Portrack Lane Stockton on Tees TS18 2RJ sian.cameron@NETA.co.uk</p>	
<p>Senior Administrator Redcar and Cleveland College Corporation Road Redcar TS10 1EZ helen.carter-smith@redcar.ac.uk</p>	

Sports Centre c/o Senior Administrator Bede Sixth Form Marsh House Avenue Stockton on Tees Billingham TS23 2HB elizabeth.eddy@stockton.ac.uk	
--	---

Senior Administrator Stockton Riverside College Harvard Avenue Stockton on Tees TS17 6FB alison.knapton@stockton.ac.uk	
--	--

Group compliments, or any involving multiple areas, should be forwarded to the Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services:

Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services Education Training Collective Harvard Avenue Thornaby Stockton-on-Tees TS17 6FB catherine.turner@the-etc.ac.uk	
--	---

All compliments will be logged centrally by the Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services/Senior Administrator/Commercial Operations and Compliance Manager. The Head of Executive and Curriculum Administration Services will ensure the compliment is shared with the relevant staff and managers. Where appropriate, compliments will be highlighted through internal communication channels and Quarterly Review processes to promote best practice and may be used to inform:

- Staff recognition or celebration events.
- Internal performance monitoring.
- Reporting to Senior Management Team (SMT) or the Corporation, where relevant.

Staff members or teams who receive formal compliments will be informed directly and may, with their agreement, have the feedback included in personal development records or appraisal discussions.

Investigating Officer role and responsibilities

Any member of staff who is appointed as the Investigating Officer for a formal complaint must handle it in an impartial, professional and efficient manner to:

1. Investigate the complaint/allegation keeping adequate notes/records.
2. Reach a judgement.
3. Respond to the complainant in writing with a copy to the College Principal.
4. Report findings to the College Principal and identify if there are significant recommendations in relation to group's practice/s or individual members of staff.

Complaints about the actions or conduct of staff are potentially the most complex to investigate and if in doubt about how to proceed guidance should be sought in the first instance from an HR advisor. This is particularly important if a safeguarding, staff disciplinary or competence issue emerges. Note all allegations that are related to safeguarding must be immediately referred to the group Designated Safeguarding Lead or Board Level Lead (please also refer to the guidance in the Allegations section of the Safeguarding policy). Complaints from staff that primarily relate to employment related issues will be investigated under the Grievance policy and procedure.

1. Investigating the complaint/allegation

In undertaking the investigation, the following principles should be observed:

- Impartiality – a neutral approach.
- Accuracy.
- Factual evidence.
- Clarity.
- Thoroughness.
- Professional approach.
- Confidentiality.

Because investigations into complaints against a member of staff may require several formal meetings, the target time for concluding the investigation may be extended, by agreement with the College Principal, beyond 15 working days.

An individual will normally not be asked to investigate a complaint if they are the subject of the complaint or have been directly involved in providing the service that is being complained about. If a conflict of interests arises advice should be sought from the College Principal or an appropriate member of the SMT as soon as possible.

The nature and seriousness of allegations can vary widely and the appropriate way to investigate the allegation can also vary. Investigating Officers need to obtain factual information on which to base their judgement(s.) They will need to question the staff and/or learner(s) involved and to obtain documentary evidence if possible. This will avert a possi-

ble dispute over the facts at a later stage. A clear record of the facts will also help Investigating Officers to reach their judgements and draft their report. This is necessary as the report may be used as evidence in a disciplinary hearing.

A member of staff who is the subject of a complaint must be informed at the earliest opportunity of the complaint. The principles of natural justice require that the member of staff be given an adequate opportunity to respond to the allegation. This would normally involve arranging a meeting with the member of staff at which they may choose to be supported by a work colleague or trade union representative.

Investigating Officers should meet with the individual making the complaint (or speak to them on the phone). This will provide an opportunity to clarify any points.

If as part of the investigation the Investigating Officer needs to interview a learner who is under 18 years of age (or the learner is under 25 years of age and in receipt of an Education and Health Care Plan and/or high needs funding), the parent/carer should be made aware of the investigation and either they (or another appropriate adult) invited to attend the meeting with the learner, where appropriate.

The Investigating Officer can request a note taker support to minute any meetings and produce typed notes from the meetings.

At the end of any investigation meeting, the Investigating Officer should summarise, check and re-check with the individual the key points of the meeting.

Dependent on the potential seriousness of the complaint it may be advisable to send notes of the meeting out to the individual. If the Investigating Officer does not receive any comments in response within 5 working days, it will be assumed that the individual agrees with the statements made.

2. Reaching a judgement

The investigation should enable the Investigating Officer to make a judgement as to whether the allegation warrants further action. The Investigating Officer should consider all the facts of the events against relevant group policies/procedures/practices and make a recommendation as to whether further action is appropriate. In arriving at recommendations, the Investigating Officer may wish to consider whether factors such as supervision and training/re-training may be appropriate.

3. Responding to the complainant

All points raised by the complainant should be addressed in the complaint outcome. A copy of the communication must be sent to the College Principal and all documentation must be saved in the designated location. This should include an overview of the evidence that has been considered and the rationale behind conclusions. Investigating Officers may also wish to detail recommendations for group practice, where appropriate.

4. Reporting to the College Principal/presentation of the case

A written report to the College Principal must be produced when an Investigating Officer has recommended that the facts of the case warrant a disciplinary hearing. At this point the Disciplinary policy and procedure will be invoked.