



Complaints Policy

(Compliments, Concerns, and Complaints)

1. Introduction

This policy is integral to Petroc's strategic values through:

Respect: we embrace differences, respect the values, ideas, and beliefs of others and review our own values through discussion and exploration.

Empowerment: we create an educational environment that empowers learners to exceed their own expectations and enables them to shape the future of our world.

Community: we believe in community – the ability to do more together, the mutual commitments that hold people together, and in responsibility beyond one's own self-interest.

It is central to one of our strategic 'ways of working' – to be continuously learning and improving.

2. Scope & purpose

- 2.1 This policy sets out Petroc's values for supporting improvement by encouraging our customers to provide feedback to help us improve education, training, and services. To support this improvement, the College seeks to actively engage learners in decision making processes.
- 2.2 The purpose of the policy is to provide a consistent process across the College. It is designed to be accessible and straightforward in order to ensure timely resolution at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.3 Petroc understands that occasionally our learners, apprentices, carers, parents, employers, and clients of stakeholders may wish to express their formal dissatisfaction about education, training or business services. This policy therefore sets out a consistent method of receiving, responding to, and resolving complaints.
- 2.4 Through this policy the College aims to resolve concerns in line with core values, in a timely, fair and courteous manner. It will review the nature of complaints as potential learning points to support improvement activity.

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- 2.5 Staff should be recognised and rewarded. In doing so, this policy sets out an expectation that formal compliments and commendations are gathered and relevant staff are duly recognised.

3. General Principles and Procedures

- 3.1 The College recognises that it has a wide range of customers that include learners of statutory education age, parents/carers, adult learners, apprentices, employers, learners in higher education, and other stakeholders.
- 3.2 All formal complaints and compliments received are recorded and monitored. A report is made to the College Leadership Team to review on a bi-monthly basis.
- 3.3 The College will use any feedback to address areas/concerns that require attention and will actively seek solutions to ensure it continues to offer a high-quality service for all service users. This includes any information that helps to understand where the College:
- Has done something well.
 - Has exceeded expectations.
 - Could have done something differently to be more effective in meeting expectations.
 - Has customers that are unhappy with the way in which they have been dealt with.
 - Has customers that have been inconvenienced.
 - Has done something incorrectly, or failed to do something.

3.4 Customer Feedback

Customers may notify the College of feedback through contact with the Quality team by email, phone or in person (email contact quality@petroc.ac.uk telephone 01271 852481 or through completion of the form online to register their feedback which can be found at:

<https://www.petroc.ac.uk/about-the-college/statutory-documentation/petroc-policies-procedures-statutory-reporting/>

In all cases, feedback of concerns, complaints and compliments will be recorded and shared with the College Leadership Team.

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In the case of complaints, the Quality team will monitor progress of a complaint, and provide support to ensure that there is a timely and professional response to feedback in line with this policy.

3.5 Customer Compliments

The College values customer feedback and will share positive comments and any compliments received, with staff, teams, and contractors involved. The College recognises the importance of continuous improvement and the way that compliments, concerns and complaints provide an opportunity for critical reflection which can drive process and quality improvements.

Where staff have gone 'above and beyond' normal expectations, compliments will be shared with the College Leadership Team. Staff will be recognised through the formal 'thank you' and/or staff awards recognition scheme.

3.6 Customer Complaints

Negative feedback will be investigated either through a formal complaints procedure or through informal means.

An informal complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction which can be resolved at the first point of contact, or which is outside the control, resources or remit of the college. Informal complaints dealt with at the first point of contact are not formally recorded.

A formal complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, requiring a more detailed response, relating to a service provided or not provided, that cannot be resolved at the first point of contact.

Should a complaint be received from a third party on behalf of a customer, the college will need the customer's permission (in writing) before the investigation can begin. Where there are known literacy, language or communication issues the college will assist a customer in providing appropriate permission and be flexible to support required.

For clarification purposes a customer complaint is not:

- a request for service
- a request for information
- a report of anti-social behaviour/neighbour dispute (which should be directed to the Neighbourhood Police Officer)
- a dispute over fees or re-payment of fees

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Complaints must be made within **six months** of the matter arising.

The College will fully investigate formal customer complaints through its published procedure.

<https://www.petroc.ac.uk/about-the-college/statutory-documentation/petroc-policies-procedures-statutory-reporting/>

This procedure provides clear stages around the progression of a complaint.

3.6.1 Customer complaints (Further Education provision)

Customers can contact the Education and Skills Fund Agency (ESFA) if they are unhappy with the way in which the complaint was handled after the College has issued a Completion of Procedures letter.

A COP letter will be issued when:

- Petroc decides there are no grounds for the complaint or appeal to be escalated to the next stage of its procedures.
- A student initiates or attempts to escalate a complaint or appeal outside Petroc's time limits.
- Petroc reaches a final decision that results in the exclusion or suspension of a student under any of its procedures, including disciplinary procedures.

3.7 Customer complaints (Higher Education provision)

3.7.1 University of Plymouth provision.

University of Plymouth awards please refer to the Higher Education Student Complaints Policy and Procedure.

3.7.2 All other HE provision.

Once a complaint is closed a letter will be sent to the student confirming a Completion of Procedure (COP). A COP letter will be issued when:

- Petroc decides that there are no grounds for the complaint or appeal to be escalated to the next stage of its procedures,
- A student initiates or attempts to escalate a complaint or appeal outside Petroc's time limits.
- Petroc reaches a final decision that results in the exclusion or suspension of a student under any of its procedures, including disciplinary procedures.

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The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education publishes information about each OIA member provider's record in handling complaints and appeals for the preceding calendar year, in the form of an on-line annual statement.

If at the end of the investigation the student is still unhappy they may use the right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for review.

3.8 Monitoring and Reporting

Complaints are monitored every two months by senior management and the Quality team. The purpose of monitoring and review is to support continuous improvement in the services provided by the College, learn lessons from specific cases and identify any systemic issues requiring wider-scale responses.

An annual report is produced for the Governing Body which sets out the key features and outcomes, highlighting any changes that have been made in response to all formal complaints.

The report is produced by the Quality Team and appropriate action plans are instigated as necessary.

The annual report considers:

- Number of formal complaints lodged.
- Number of formal complaints upheld and rejected.
- Formal complaints divided by age, ethnic origin, gender and disability.
- Mode of attendance, programme and level of study.
- Actions recommended and carried out, and impact.
- Formal concerns by the Faculty

4. Definition and Scope

4.1 Complaints

Any individual who thinks that they have a justified cause for concern should feel able to raise the matter without fear of subsequent victimisation. Whether the complaint is eventually upheld or not, individuals have the right to raise complaints as long as they do so in good faith.

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Students should note that raising a vexatious or malicious complaint may lead to disciplinary procedures being invoked.

This policy clearly distinguishes between an informal complaint (which is an opportunity for an individual to bring a matter that they are unhappy about directly to the individual concerned, within the Faculty they are studying) and a formal complaint (which is a formal statement by an individual, which will be formally responded to and which the individual has the right to pursue if they are not satisfied with the initial response).

If a complaint is raised with a member of staff, the individual's permission must be given before the issue is raised with others. The member of staff should explain this to the complainant.

Matters raised as a formal complaint will remain confidential to those directly involved in the investigation of, and response to, the complaint (which includes any staff complained of, or who are responsible for the matters complained of). All staff and students who become aware of any of the issues involved in a formal complaint are required to keep this information confidential insofar as is necessary to progress, investigate or respond to the complaint. Failure to do so may result in formal disciplinary action being taken through the Learner or Staff Disciplinary Procedure.

Complaints may be raised individually or collectively. In the case of a group complaint, each complainant must individually complete a separate form.

4.2 Key members of staff

Investigatory Officers are members of the College Management Team and are the primary contact relating to concerns/ complaints. These Officers are responsible for implementing this policy and associated procedures.

The Quality Team will produce reports which feed into internal Quality meetings with Faculties and other departments providing services, and an annual report which reports into the Governing Body.

4.3 Support

Petroc is committed to providing impartial advice and support to learners wishing to register a concern or a complaint. This is provided through the tutorial system, often directly through Student Support teams or with the support of a learner's Tutor, or Petroc Student Union.

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Students with additional learning or high needs may access the support of the Head of Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) to register a concern or complaint.

5. Process of raising a complaint

5.1 Informal stage

It is expected that where a complainant is dissatisfied with the provision of a service, they will normally raise their concern with the person most directly responsible to resolve any issues, as soon as possible.

If the complainant feels they are unable to raise this directly they can email the Quality Team on: quality@petroc.ac.uk or use our online form which can be found on the college website under policies:

<https://www.petroc.ac.uk/about-the-college/statutory-documentation/petroc-policies-procedures-statutory-reporting/>

Informal complaints are resolved at the point of being raised, resulting in the customer receiving a satisfactory response to their informal complaint.

5.2 Complaint Stage 1

A complainant who wishes to make a formal complaint should do so through the complaints process and/or if they are unhappy with the outcome of the informal response.

Formal complaints received by the Quality Team will be acknowledged within 5 working days.

The Quality Department will send the stage one complaint to the Faculty Manager or the relevant service Manager, the Faculty Manager or service Manager will respond to the complainant within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint during term time only. (If a complaint is received within the holiday period, the 10 working days will begin from the first day of term).

If in the unlikely event that a response to a complaint is going to take longer the complainant will be informed within the 10 day period.

A copy of the response should also be forwarded to the Quality Team who will log the response and response date.

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5.3 Complaint Stage 2

Where the complainant is unhappy with the response and outcome of stage one the complaint will be referred to a member of the Executive Team (either Vice Principal or Deputy Principal) for an independent review of the situation and evidence to suggest a suitable outcome.

Notification of the receipt of stage 2 will be made within five working days.

The Executive Team member managing stage 2 may undertake an appropriate investigation of the complaint. Following the full investigation, they will provide an outcome letter to the complainant within 10 working days.

Where a complaint is against an Assistant Principal the complaint will be referred to the Deputy Principal. Where it is a complaint against the Vice Principal or Deputy Principal it will be referred to the Principal and CEO.

5.3.1 Appeals

Following completion of Stage 2, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response/outcome, they may appeal in writing to the Principal & Chief Executive Officer via the Quality Team stating the reasons. Requests for appeals must be received within 5 working days following receipt of Stage 2 outcome being received.

Appeals may only be made on the following grounds:

There were procedural irregularities in the handling of the complaint

There is new evidence which can be presented which was not available at earlier stages of the complaint.

Appeal requests should contain details of any procedural irregularities and/or any new evidence that can be presented that was not available at earlier stages of the complaint.

The Principal & Chief Executive Officer's decision is final.

A complainant who is dissatisfied with the outcome of the decision following exhaustion of the college policy may be entitled to complain to the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) for FE students, or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE students

5.4 Academic Appeals

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Where the feedback that is received relates to dissatisfaction with a qualification outcome, then it will be referred to in the academic appeals process and not progressed through the complaints process.

5.5 Frivolous or vexatious complaints

The College may reject any complaint without full consideration if it is considered frivolous or vexatious. Examples of what the College considers to be frivolous or vexatious include:

- Complaints which are obsessive, harassing or repetitive.
- Insistence on pursuing unmeritorious complaints.
- Seeking unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes.
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or nature.

6. Application of Policy

The College Leadership Team is responsible for the application of this policy and delegates responsibility to the College Management Team for investigation and response. Responsibility is delegated to the Quality Team for any required quality improvement processes.

The findings and analysis of complaints and compliments will be constantly monitored. Regular reporting will take place at the College Leadership Team meeting and the Governing Body to ensure procedures are in place to improve service levels and standards.

6.1 Performance Improvement Review Meetings

The outcomes of complaints arising from the Faculties will be raised at Performance Improvement Reviews.

Lessons learned and resulting quality improvement actions will be recorded and monitored in curriculum Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) and included under recommendations within the Annual Report to the Full Governing Body.

7. Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years.

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Feedback from learners, staff and wider customers will be taken into account when reviewing this policy.

Please note that complaints regarding parking issues/tickets are to be addressed directly with the parking company, as they operate independently from the college.

Appendix 1 Complaints Procedure

Informal stage	
Any complaint should be raised directly with the person(s) concerned or responsible for that service as soon as possible after the experience that gave	

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rise to the complaint. If this is not possible then it should be raised with the Quality Office.
You should try to arrange a meeting with the relevant person(s). You may wish to be accompanied by a friend. At the meeting you should state the nature of your complaint and the outcome you are seeking. It may help to put your thoughts in writing and to take notes during the meeting. If a meeting is not possible or appropriate, you should email the person(s).
<p>The informal stage ends when one of the following applies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outcome that is acceptable to you has been put forward and you consider the matter resolved. • You are not satisfied with the outcome of your informal meeting with the person(s) to whom you complained.
Formal – stage 1
<p>In order for the complaint to be considered formally, you must put the complaint in writing on the Complaint Form and send it to Quality@petroc.ac.uk.</p> <p>You must include your contact details, details of the complaint, the remedy sought and any supporting evidence.</p> <p>You should also explain how you have attempted to raise the matter informally and why you remain dissatisfied. Please attach an e-mail or other written confirmation to the form that the matter has been raised informally.</p>
Complaints received by the Quality Team will be acknowledged within 5 working days
<p>The Quality Department will send the stage one complaint to the Faculty Manager or the relevant service manager. The Faculty Manager or service Manager will respond to the complainant within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint during term time only. (If a complaint is received within the holiday period, the 10 working days will begin from the first day of term).</p>
You will receive a written decision which addresses the points you have made with reasons for the conclusions that have been reached (which may include a summary of any investigation report). The letter will also advise you of your right to refer the matter to the Stage 2.
Where recommendations are made as a consequence of your complaint, you may be entitled to know what these may be and when they will be implemented.
Formal stage – stage 2
Where the complainant is unhappy with the response and outcome of stage one, the complaint will be referred to a member of the

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Executive Team (either, Vice Principal or Deputy Principal) for an independent review of the situation and evidence to suggest a suitable solution.
Notification of the receipt of the stage 2 will be made within five working days.
Appeal
Following completion of Stage 2, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response/outcome, they may appeal in writing to the Principal & Chief Executive Officer via the Quality Team stating the reasons
Requests for appeals must be received within 5 working days following receipt of Stage 2 outcome being received.
Appeals may only be made on the following grounds: There were procedural irregularities in the handling of the complaint There is new evidence which can be presented which was not available at earlier stages of the complaint. Appeal requests should contain details of any procedural irregularities and/or any new evidence that can be presented that was not made available at earlier stages of the complaint.
Higher education provision. If you remain unhappy with the outcome you may refer your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for consideration. This should be submitted within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.
Review – service improvement
The Quality office will supply reports every two months to the Executive Office which will include the numbers of cases considered at the formal stage.

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