Complaints Procedure (Non-student Related)

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Person Responsible	Deputy Executive Principal – Teaching, Learning & Improvement
Approval/ review body	SLT
Frequency of Review*	36 months

**** Policies will be reviewed more frequently if legal changes or good practice require***

Review History:		
Date	Reviewed by	Reason for review
June 2025	Deputy Executive Principal – Teaching, Learning & Improvement	Policy created.
October 2026	Deputy Executive Principal – Teaching, Learning & Improvement	Amended to new NKC Group branding. The Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 require an update to the wording around data protection complaints. This has been included under Section 3 below. How to deal with data protection complaints | ICO

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Related Documentation:

Academic Misconduct Policy, Behaviour Policy, Code of Conduct, College Charter, College Expectations, Data Protection Policy and Procedure, Fitness to Study Policy, Mental Health Policy, Privacy Statement

Approved: October 2026
Next Review: June 2028

1. Statement

North Kent Colleges Group hereinafter collectively called "the College", values its strong reputation with the local community. However, from time-to-time problems do occur. You have the right to pursue the resolution of any difficulties, and the College will undertake to respond to your complaint fairly and impartially, with care and concern. The College will also seek to learn from complaints which are upheld and make changes as necessary.

2. Application and Scope

The College will thoroughly investigate any complaint, whether informal or formal, relating to the day-to-day operation of the College and the standards of service it provides.

2.1. Areas excluded from the procedure are:

2.1.1. any matter which is the subject of legal action;

2.1.2. anonymous complaints as they cannot be investigated, and/or

2.1.3. any complaint which has been deemed to be vexatious or malicious following investigation.

3. Data Protection

In line with the Data Protection Act 2018, the College's obligations as a Data controller is to its students and to their personal data as well as protection to any parties who deal with the College in terms of our wider stakeholders.

Further information on Data Protection can be found in the College's Privacy Notice and NKC Data Protection Policy and Procedures.

If a data subject is unhappy with how we collect, use, or protect their personal data, they have the right to make a complaint. In the first instance, they should get in touch with their appropriate department so that they can investigate and try to resolve their concern. Alternatively, the complaint can be sent to the Data Protection Officer on dpo@northkent.ac.uk

They should include their name, contact details, and sufficient information about their complaint to help us respond promptly.

We may ask for additional information to allow us to confirm their identity and to enable us to effectively investigate their complaint.

We recognise that data subjects have the right to contact us through any media eg. Post, telephone, email and social media. However, in line with guidance provided by the Information Commissioners' Office (ICO), we will not respond to complaints via social media as this is not a secure way of providing information. Instead, we would ask that they contact us through one of the routes outlined below.

If a complaint is made on behalf of another person (e.g. a family member) we will ask them

to provide evidence, they are authorised to act on the other person's behalf. The form of evidence will depend on the circumstances of the complaint, but some examples are:

- an appropriate power of attorney; or
- a signed letter of authority from the person they are acting on behalf of.
- direct consent from the data subject.

As required by the legislation, if we do not receive substantive evidence, we will be unable to process the complaint.

We will acknowledge their complaint within 30 days of receipt of their communication. Whilst we investigate the complaint, we will keep them informed of progress and explain the outcome of our investigations.

If they remain dissatisfied, they have the right to lodge a complaint with the UK's supervisory authority for data protection, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), who is the regulatory authority which oversees data protection compliance in the UK.

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF
ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/

3.1. Data Retention and Use

When the College receives a complaint from a person, a file is created containing the details of the complaint. This normally contains the identity of the complainant, and any other individuals involved in the complaint.

The College will only use the personal information collected to process the complaint and to check on the level of service it provides. The College does compile an annual report detailing the number of complaints and compliments received for overview by the Board of Governors; however, all data contained within this report is submitted in an anonymised basis.

The College will keep personal information contained in complaint files. This means that information relating to a complaint will be retained for five years from closure. It will be retained in a secure environment and access to it will be restricted according to the "need to know" principle.

4. Resolving a Complaint

The complainant should attempt to resolve the matter informally, as soon as possible and no later than three calendar months after the event or problem has occurred. This may involve a telephone, email or in-person communication with one of the senior leads on the campus.

Where no informal resolution can be achieved within fifteen working days of the initial complaint being raised, the complainant may choose to escalate their concerns – please refer to "Stage Two" detailed below.

5. Unreasonable Complaints

Unreasonable actions are those which, because of the nature or frequency of contact with the College, hinder its delivery of education or consideration of complaints.

Please see Appendix A for further information.

6. The Procedures

6.1. Informal Complaints (Stage One)

These complaints are dealt with through contacting Reception of the campus to which the complaint relates. Reception will direct to the relevant senior campus lead.

6.1.1. the matter should be raised within two working weeks of the issue so that any concerns are addressed promptly.

6.1.2. in most instances, informal complaints will not receive a formal written response but nevertheless will be dealt with promptly; and

6.1.3. if you do not believe the matter has been dealt with sufficiently through the informal route, this then escalates the complaint to Stage Two.

If you feel the discussion did not resolve the matter, then the complaint should be made in writing to the College through the online complaint's procedure on the North Kent College website. At this point, the complaint will become a formal complaint and be centrally logged as part of Stage Two.

6.2. Formal Complaints (Stage Two)

At this stage the complaint is dealt with by a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

6.2.1. Formal complaints must be made in writing, either by letter to:

Complaints
North Kent College
Oakfield Lane
Dartford
Kent DA1 2JT

Or, alternatively, a formal complaint can be submitted on-line, via the College's website: North Kent College - Complaints

6.2.2. All correspondence submitted should clearly set out the circumstances of the complaint, any individuals or witnesses involved and all relevant dates and/or times.

6.2.3. Complaints must be submitted in a timely fashion, no later than three calendar months after the concern/event.

6.2.4. Complaints received after this 3-month period will not be investigated, as they will be considered to be out of time.

6.2.5. Complaints raised on an anonymous basis will be investigated if the matter impacts on the welfare or safeguarding of students, however, due to the nature of a complaint made on this basis there can be no written correspondence detailing any outcomes. However, if the anonymous complaint is outside of safeguarding, it will not be investigated.

6.2.6. Complaints will be investigated fairly and robustly by a member of the College's Senior Leadership Team.

6.2.7. The complainant must refrain from contacting any member of the College about the complaint whilst the investigation is ongoing as this will hamper the process and delay the response;

6.2.8. The College will respond in writing within fifteen working days from the date of the letter of acknowledgement, detailing the outcome of their investigation.

6.2.9. If the investigation is going to take more than fifteen working days, a further letter to this effect will be sent allowing more time.

6.2.10. Where complaints are received within fifteen working days of a holiday period, or during a holiday period, it is expected that the complaint response will take longer than fifteen working days due to the absence of appropriate staff to investigate. This will be confirmed in writing.

6.3. Appeals (Stage Three)

6.3.1. If the complainant remains dissatisfied or in disagreement with the decision made; that evidence submitted at the time of the complaint had not been considered in the investigation process and/or the reasons given for the finding were unsound, they may appeal against the decision.

An appeal can only be raised by the person who raised the initial complaint.

The appeal must detail why the complainant feels the decision made was incorrect. It is the complainant's responsibility to provide evidence to support their assertion. The appeal process is purely to review the investigation and decision made on the facts presented at the time. In view of this, new evidence cannot be produced at the appeal stage.

A complainant has ten working days from the date of the response letter in which to submit an appeal. The reason for the appeal should be clearly stated in writing and sent to:

Rhiannon Hughes
Deputy Executive Principal - Teaching, Learning & Improvement
North Kent College
Oakfield Lane
Dartford
Kent DA1 2JT

Alternatively, an appeal request, with any accompanying information and/or evidence, can be submitted to:

principalsoffice@northkent.ac.uk

6.3.2. A letter of acknowledgement will be sent within five working days of receipt of the appeal letter.

6.3.3. The appellant must not contact any member of the College regarding the appeal whilst the investigation is ongoing as it will hamper the process.

6.3.4. The Deputy Executive Principal – Teaching, Learning and Improvement will consider all the documentation available relating to the issues raised and will respond within fifteen working days from the date of the acknowledgement letter. If the complaint directly relates to the Deputy Executive Principal – Teach, Learning and Improvement, then another Executive member of the Senior Leadership Team will be assigned the appeal.

6.3.5. If the appeal process is going to take more than fifteen working days, a further holding letter will be sent.

6.3.6. The decision at the end of this stage is final.

6.3.7. If the College cannot settle the complaint to the satisfaction of the appellant, the complainant can refer the matter to The Department for Education. The contact details of which can be found on the following link: Complaints procedure - Department for Education - GOV.UK. Alternatively, you can write to them at:

Complaints
Ministerial and Public Communications Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

Appendix A: Unreasonable Complaints

The College takes complaints very seriously and uses them as an opportunity to improve the service it provides.

The College will consider the circumstances of each complaint received. Whilst the majority of complaints are made with good intentions, some complainants become more unreasonably persistent over time.

1. Unreasonable Complaints

   The list below gives examples of unreasonable complaints. Please note that this list is not exhaustive:

   1.1. being abusive, threatening or acting in a manner intended to intimidate staff. This includes any use of racist, sexist, homophobic or other discriminatory language;

   1.2. putting, or threatening to put information on social media or websites which includes personal information of an organisation's employees without their consent and/or making defamatory statements about employees online;

   1.3. making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to individual or numerous College staff, or detailed correspondence every few days or more often, and expecting immediate responses;

   1.4. submitting repeat contacts or complaints with minor additions/variations which the complainant insists make these "new" complaints;

   1.5. refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint;

   1.6. refusing to cooperate with the complaint's investigation process. For example, failing to provide information requested that is important for the investigation;

   1.7. insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or College's internal systems;

   1.8. making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced/dismissed;

   1.9. frequently changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.

   1.10. raising many detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are all answered;

   1.11. providing false information and/ or submitting falsified documents from themselves or others; and/or

   1.12. adopting a "scatter gun" approach: pursuing parallel complaints or contact about the same issue with various organisations.

2. Supporting the Complainant

   Notwithstanding the above, when assessing whether a complainant becomes unreasonably persistent, the College will look firstly to support the complainant. Below are the steps the College will take to support the complainant:

2.1. The College will assess, to the best of its ability, whether the complainant has any difficulties in communicating.

2.2. If the College believes that the complainant has any barriers to communication, it will ask whether the complainant requires a representative to assist them.

3. Behaviour of the Complainant

If the behaviour of the complainant becomes unreasonable (i.e. using bad language, threats, making unreasonable demands etc.) the College will issue an informal warning, explaining to the Complainant which aspect(s) of their behaviour(s) is unacceptable. In the first instance, they will be spoken to and their unreasonable behaviours identified when asking for modification. If the behaviours continue, the College will put into writing the request and make clear that if the behaviours do not improve, the College will put into place restrictions in respect to any future communications.

3.1. Restricting Contact with the Complainant

The College will consider whether restrictions should be imposed on the Complainant.

Restrictions may include but are not limited to:

3.1.1. Refusing to take their phone communications;

3.1.2. restricting contact to email communication only to an individual named officer or generic inbox;

3.1.3. placing correspondence on file without acknowledgement or reply;

3.1.4. restricting access to certain Campuses of the College; and/or

3.1.5. restricting access to any of the College's Campuses.

Where restrictions are considered to be appropriate, the College will write to the Complainant and set these out clearly.

3.2. When a complainant acts outside of restrictions

In the first instance, the complainant will be reminded of the restrictions in place.

If the complainant disregards the restrictions for a second time or attends any campus of the College when not invited, the complaint will be lapsed. No further communication will be made to the Complainant and, where necessary, College security will be called to escort the individual off the campus. If the individual resists or becomes a nuisance, the College will contact the Police.

4. Violence or Threats of Violence

The College takes the welfare and safeguarding of its employees and visitors as seriously as it does that of its students.

Where behaviours of complainants or their representatives threaten or endanger any member of staff, a visitor, or a student, the College reserves its right to call the Police, lapse the complaint and restrict all contact with the complainant.