



Complaints Policy and Procedures

Policy review area	Students
Lead manager	Principal
Approval level	Board
Start date	October 2019
Review cycle	1 year
Next review	September 2020

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1. Introduction

The TEC Complaints Policy and Procedure is designed to help our learners to raise issues, problems or complaints and to obtain a speedy response from Training to resolve any complaints.

This policy is formulated in accordance with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – with specific reference to Chapter B9 Complaints and Appeals.

Integral to TECs approach to monitoring and enhancing all aspects of its operation are students' views. The views of students are welcome and TEC believes that students should be provided with the opportunity to express concerns about all aspects of TEC operation through providing feedback or making a complaint.

Definition of a Complaint

TEC defines a complaint as:

“The expression of a specific concern about the provision of a course/ module, or a programme of study, or a related academic service.”

TEC also has a separate **Appeals Policy** which is concerned with a specific request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with decisions of student progression, assessment and awards.

Communicating our Complaints Policy

Information about our complaints Policy is widely available through:

- TEC website
- The Learning Wall
- The Student Handbook
- The Staff Handbook
- Student Representatives meetings

Students and staff are also informed about the Complaints Policy at:

- Staff induction and at the start of the academic year.
- Student induction to their course.
- At Student Representative meetings.

Senior staff are reminded of their responsibility to deal effectively with complaints through the staff review process.

The Scope of our Complaints Policy

Our Complaints Procedure can be used by:

- individuals applying to TEC;
- current students;
- students who completed their course or left TEC within the previous three months.

Our Complaint Procedure covers situations where a student has a serious complaint concerning:

- the conduct of a member of staff towards him or her;
- the delivery of a programme upon which he or she is enrolled, which cannot be resolved by informal processes;
- a service provided by our College which cannot be resolved by informal processes.

Our Complaint Procedure does not cover:

- appeals against the decision of Assessment Boards – see Appeals Policy;
- appeals against the decisions of the Extenuation Panel – see Extenuating Circumstances Policy;
- complaints against the Students' Representative Body – see Role of Student Representatives;
- appeals against decisions taken under disciplinary proceeding;
- complaints about the behaviour of other students;
- appeals against the decision of Investigating Panels;
- complaints that relate to a matter of academic judgment.

General Principles

We recognise that complaints need to be resolved well and we have put in place processes that support and expect people to act reasonably and fairly towards each other and treat the processes themselves with respect and not abuse them. We will:

- Have fair, effective and timely procedures for dealing with complaints and to ensure confidentiality (unless disclosure is necessary to enable the complaint to be progressed).
- Ensure our complaints procedure is overseen and reviewed by senior staff.
- Encourage regular feedback and ensure that all students have the opportunity to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage.
- Ensure our complaints procedure is publicly accessible at all times and that it can be easily understood by all our students and staff.
- Implement our complaints procedure with regards to any applicable law(s).
- Ensure that appropriate action is taken following a complaint (whether informal or formal).
- Make provision available to support and guide any persons complaining – including provision for persons being accompanied at any stage, including formal hearings.
- Have in place effective arrangements to monitor, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of our complaints procedures and to reflect on the outcomes to make future improvements and learn from lessons.
- Provide suitable briefings and support for all staff and students involved in handling or supporting a complaint.

2. COMPLAINTS PROCESS AND TIMEFRAME

Before submitting a complaint, students are advised to consider whether the matter is a concern/ feedback or a complaint and whether there are other more suitable ways for them to express their concerns. For example, this may be through discussion with the Course Tutor, Student Welfare Officer, Enrolment Officer and through their Student Representative (and the monthly Student Representatives meeting with college staff) for their class and through the course feedback surveys.

TEC will deal with concerns and complaints in a manner proportionate to the complexity of the matter and would encourage informal proceedings to be used wherever possible in the first instance – unless there is a serious complaint.

Our complaints procedure allows for an informal complaint to move to a Stage 2 Formal Complaint where appropriate, and a student can be supported by the Student Welfare Officer to move to a formal complaint procedure.

Stage One - Informal Complaints Procedure

Students are advised to consider the different ways in which they can provide feedback or express concern about issues that can more effectively and efficiently be dealt with through TEC informal avenues and on-going student/ customer feedback processes. TEC regularly seeks the views of its customers/ students through:

- The Student Representatives meeting with Academic and Administrative Staff which is held on a monthly basis and covers areas all areas of the curriculum, standards, facilities etc.
- End of course unit feedback form/review - a formal feedback form on each unit which is completed at the end of the course assessment each semester.
- One-to-one feedback and discussion between the teaching staff and students.

Deciding on whether a complaint can be dealt with informally or formally may also depend on the nature of the complaint and how the complainant would like the issue to be resolved. At each stage the person investigating the complaint will make sure they:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved.
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
- Meet the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary).
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
- Interview those involved in the matter and/ or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of the interview.

At each stage in the procedure TEC will also bear in mind the ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be enough to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology.
- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An assurance that the event complained about will not recur.
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again.
- An undertaking to review TEC policies/ practices in light of the complaint.

The outcome of a complaint – both informal and formal, is given to the student in writing. The outcome is also monitored and reviewed as part of the review and quality management processes.

The outcome and actions of the Student Representatives meetings are to the Learning Wall, and displayed on the notice boards so that students are aware of the points raised and the actions taken as a result.

The outcome of student surveys and customer feedback are also made available to students and all staff through Learning Wall and through TEC notice boards.

Before a student raises a formal complaint, they are encouraged to seek the advice of the Student Representatives I. All students are encouraged to attempt to resolve their complaint informally and conciliate on the issue with the member of staff most directly concerned before submitting a formal complaint.

If a student does not want to contact their tutor or other member of staff concerned with their complaint, the student can contact TEC Academic Head or the Student Welfare Office who are responsible for the co-ordination of student complaint procedure.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with the complaint, the Academic Head will consider referring the complaint to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior – but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

If a student believes that the complaint cannot be resolved through conciliation with the member of staff - or if they wish to proceed directly to a formal complaint then the student/ complainant can complete the Complaint Form and return it to the Student Welfare Officer and proceed to the formal complaints process. The Student Welfare Officer will help the student to complete the complaint form if required.

Stage Two - Formal Complaint Procedure

Throughout our complaints procedure we will ensure:

- Confidentiality at the informal stage.
- Accessibility of information.
- Clarity of procedure.
- A staged approach with specified times and an informal and formal stage.
- Advice and support in using the procedure.
- Stated response times.
- Resolution at local level wherever possible.
- Entitlement to have a well-founded and documented formal complaint heard.
- Every effort made by TEC to prevent victimisation of a student who has made a complaint.

The stages of the student complaints procedure are designed to provide a response to the complaint at the earliest feasible opportunity. Students are made aware of the importance of keeping a note of the discussions they have at each stage and the dates on which they take place.

When making an informal or formal complaint, students are advised to keep copies of relevant documents. Additionally, they may wish to have the support of a friend, who could accompany them to meetings when their complaint is discussed. This is particularly important when the student is

making a formal complaint as the complaint form requires specific information and evidence if possible, to back up their complaint. The Student Welfare Officer can also provide support in completing the forms and in accompanying students to a formal hearing of their complaint if required.

TEC requires that the student making the complaint must be present at any formal hearing or panel review. The student can be supported but cannot be represented in their absence. We would not normally expect a student to be accompanied by legal representation unless this had been discussed and agreed with TEC beforehand. Legal representation is likely to be the exception rather than the rule.

Staff are provided with support and guidance regarding handling complaints through guidance the staff handbook and through briefing notes that may from time to time be provided to staff during staff meetings and training. Staff are briefed in how the informal stages of complaints relate to formal stages – and the processes and opportunities available to students to provide feedback.

Staff are informed of the importance of keeping notes of meetings and outcomes of discussions with complainants. They are also informed of the limits to their authority - any outcome of a complaint that results in a decision or changes must be agreed with senior management or TEC Principal.

Where a member of staff is the subject of the complaint, they will be able to seek support from a colleague and will also be invited to have a colleague present at any formal hearing of a complaint against them. The HR Manager may also be involved to provide support where appropriate.

The outcome of a complaint - both informal and formal – is given to the student in writing. The letter will confirm the completion of proceedings, with the decision/ outcome reached and the reason for reaching the decision.

A formal complaint will be reviewed by an appropriate senior member of staff which will be the Head of Academics or Head of Finance depending on the nature of the complaint. The Principal may be the most appropriate senior person in some circumstances. If having made a formal complaint the student is happy with the outcome the process will be complete and a formal record of the complaint will be filed and any resulting action will be monitored and reviewed.

If at any time a student makes a formal complaint to the police or takes other legal action at the same time they use this procedure, then no further investigation by TEC using this procedure will be undertaken. The complainant and TEC must adhere to any matters relating to the Law and any breaches of the Law will be dealt with by the appropriate authority.

The formal complaints procedure should not be confused with 'whistle-blowing'. TEC has a 'whistle-blowing policy and procedure where it is appropriate to use this.

Stage Three - Complaint Panel

If it is not possible to resolve a complaint satisfactorily at the highest level within TEC (by the relevant Department Head), then a Complaints Panel will be set up to deal with the complaint.

The Complaints Panel will normally consist of the Head of Administration, the Head Academics and the TEC Principal.

If the complaint still cannot be resolved to a satisfactory conclusion then the student will be advised that the procedure within TEC has been exhausted and the matter for TEC is closed. The student will be advised that the only course of action left for the complainant is to contact the Office of the Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

Address:

Kings Reach,
38-50 King's Rd,
Reading,
Berkshire
RG1 3AA

Timeframes

Informal Stage of Complaint

Wherever possible we would encourage an informal complaint to be dealt with immediately and encourage the complainant to discuss the matter with the person directly involved or the Student Welfare Officer. It is possible that if the complaint requires a simple response it can be dealt with **within 24 hours**.

If the complaint is not raised immediately then an informal complaint should be raised within **ten days** of the initial cause for concern.

TEC commits to respond and to provide a written record of the outcome to the complaint within **five working days**.

If the initial discussion about the complaint does not lead to a satisfactory outcome, then:

- The student can take the issue to one or more of the following appropriate contacts: The Student Welfare Officer, the Head of Administration, or the Head Academics.
- Where the outcome of the complaint is satisfactory, the student will receive a written statement of a satisfactory outcome within **five working days**.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved within **ten working days** and, if the having talked the complaint through in a confidential manner, there is still not a satisfactory outcome then students are advised to use the formal complaint procedure.

Formal Stage of Complaint

A formal complaint should be made no later than **one calendar month** after the initial concern/problem/ incident. A formal complaint is made using the formal complaints form (see Appendix A). Hard copies are available from the Student Welfare Officer. The form is also available online through the website and through the Learning Wall and Student Handbook. If the student has not already used the informal complaint process they are advised to consult with their tutor, the Student Welfare Officer, a friend or a Student Representative before completing the form.

The completed form should be sent (by email if possible), marked 'Confidential Complaint', to the Head of Academics. If a complaint is directed at a named member or members of staff, he/she/they

will be advised of the complaint and invited to respond. At this point it will no longer be possible for the complainant to remain anonymous. The student will receive a response within **15 working days**.

Complaints Panel

If the issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Department Head then a Complaints Panel will be convened within ten **working days** of the formal response being given to the student. The Panel members will be represented by senior staff including the Head of Administration and the Head of Academics - with an independent chair which would normally be TEC Principal.

The student will be invited to the panel to discuss the matter further. If a resolution is reached at the Panel, the student will receive a written response, detailing the outcome within **five working days**.

TEC– Complaints Flow Chart



3. MONITORING AND EVALUATING

TEC is committed to continuously improving its service to students and to raising standards throughout TEC. Taking account of feedback and complaints is a very important and effective way of making changes that can result in a positive contribution to TEC quality assurance and enhancement framework. Monitoring and evaluation will also help TEC ensure that the complaints procedure is working effectively. TEC will record, monitor and evaluate the feedback and complaints received and the action taken.

The Student Welfare Officer will collect and collate information for all complaints (informal and formal) at all stages. This will be done on a monthly basis by the Student Welfare Officer. The outcome of the **Complaints Log** (see Appendix B) summary will be disseminated through The Learning Wall, college notice boards and the Student Representatives Meetings.

Informal complaints raised through the Student Representative meetings will not record individual student data, but a record of the issues raised and the action taken as a result of the issue(s) will be monitored and reviewed. Records are kept and the outcome of action is fed back to the next meeting of the Student Representatives.

For other individual student informal or formal complaint where the Student Welfare Officer has a record of the complaint and is aware of the name of the student concerned, data will be kept regarding the number of complaints made by:

- students in year one or year two of their studies;
- the course group of the student;
- the gender and ethnicity of those making a complaint;
- whether those students making a complaint had a disability;
- the age profile of the complainant(s);
- the number of complaints made by international students, students from EU communities other than the UK, and UK students.

The Student Welfare Officer will produce a summary report at the end of each semester (three times a year). The summary report will be seen and reviewed by the senior management team (Principal, Head of Administration and Head of Quality Assurance). An end of year report will also be produced for the Academic Committee to consider as part of its review of provision and forward planning.

TEC will publicise to all staff and students, information from summary reports of the complaints and feedback. This will help raise awareness of the procedures themselves and will enhance the confidence of students and staff of the transparency and effectiveness of TEC complaints procedures.



Appendix A

Formal Complaint Form

1. Personal Details	
Name:	Student ID:
Programme:	Year:
Address:	Telephone No:
	Email
2. Complaint Details	
<p>Please state the nature of your complaint and give further details (use separate sheets if necessary). Please give exact date(s)/time(s) and location(s) of incident(s) wherever possible. Retrospective complaints (three calendar months after the informal complaint) will not be considered.</p>	
<p>Do you have any documentary evidence to support your complaint? Please give details and attach copies where possible.</p>	

From your point of view, what would be the desired outcome of your complaint?

What prevented the complaint from being resolved informally?

Who else have you discussed this complaint with (e.g. Head of Student Services)? Has advice been given and have you acted on this advice?

Can you suggest any action which will prevent this situation from recurring?

3. Declaration

I declare that the information given in this formal complaint form is a true statement of the acts and that I would be willing, if required, to answer further questions related to it.

I also agree (in accordance with the Data Protection Act) to this form being held on file by the Head of Student Services.

Signed:

Date:

Completed forms should be handed in to the Administration Office, for which you will be given a receipt.

For Office Use only:

Date complaint received.....

Date receipt provided.....

Office Reference

Name of the recipient

Complaint form sent to

Remember to send a copy to the Head of Student Services



Appendix B

COMPLAINT LOG – SUMMARY SHEET

DATE RECEIVED	SOURCE OF COMPLAINT NAME / STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES MEETING (SRM)	SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT	ACTION TAKEN	DATE OF ACTION	COLLEGE AUTHORISED SIGNATURE