



POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Customer Complaints and Compliments Policy

Policy Owner:	Head of Quality & Student Engagement
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1. Policy Purpose

- 1.1 South West College is committed to providing the highest quality of service to all our customers. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of service provided by the College or College staff, they have the right to complain.
- 1.2 The raising of complaints and the provision of feedback provides the College with an opportunity to improve its services. The College monitors complaints and the outcomes to improve the quality of our provision. This policy advises customers of the College's commitment to ensuring that any issues or problems are resolved quickly and as close to the source as possible, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

2. Policy Scope

- 2.1 For the purposes of this policy, a customer may be a student, external customer, member of the public or third-party stakeholder.
- 2.2 The College will comply with the Standards for Complaint Handling in the Public Service agreed by the Permanent Secretaries Group, ensuring that:
 - There are clear lines of accountability for the handling and consideration of complaints within the College.
 - Complainants have open and easy access to the College's complaints policy and information required to enable them to complain about any aspect of service.
 - Complaints are dealt with through an efficient and effective process.
 - All investigations are conducted promptly, thoroughly, openly, honestly, and objectively.
 - Complaints are responded to as promptly as possible, and all issues raised are addressed.
 - The College promotes a culture of learning from complaints so that, where necessary, service, processes and practices can be improved.
 - The organisation monitors the effectiveness of its complaint handling and responsiveness.

2.3 In addition, the College will:

- Ensure that all positive comments are passed on to the relevant staff members.
- Process all complaints in a fair, consistent, and unbiased manner.
- Endeavour to communicate with the customer within agreed timeframes throughout the process.
- Ensure no customer is disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint.
- Promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).
- Respect confidentiality and protect customers' data in line with legislation.
- Monitor and review complaints and compliments for quality assurance and equality monitoring purposes.

2.4 Exemptions to this policy include:

- Anonymous complaints, which will not usually be investigated, but will be recorded.
- Matters where another policy or procedure applies; for example, academic appeals¹
- The right of the College not to investigate unreasonable or vexatious complaints.
- Staff complaints which fall under separate employment policies & procedures.

3. Definitions

3.1 Compliments

A compliment is positive feedback on the service provided by the College.

If a customer feels that the College has exceeded the expected standard of service or wishes to leave a compliment or positive comment, they can either:

¹ Please refer to [HE student handbook](#) for information on academic appeals

- Complete a 'Customer Compliments Form' (Appendix 2). Forms may be downloaded from the College website here - Policies , or they may be requested at Reception.
- Email the College on compliments@swc.ac.uk and/or
- Advise a member of staff in person of the positive experience.

3.2 Comments

A comment is feedback on a service or situation which the customer would like to draw attention to but is not so serious that investigation is required.

Comments may be emailed to complaints@swc.ac.uk

3.3 Informal Complaint

3.3.1 An informal complaint is a complaint which can reasonably be resolved through discussion or correspondence and does not require a formal investigation.

3.3.2 If there is an occasion where a customer is not satisfied with the service we provide, they have a right to complain.

- We would encourage customers in the first instance to seek to resolve any issues informally with the relevant member of staff e.g., face-to-face discussion.
- Where a resolution cannot be found, or if the complaint is sufficiently serious, the customer may submit a formal complaint in writing.

3.4 Formal Complaint

3.4.1 A formal complaint is a complaint which is very serious in nature involving potential unlawful behaviour, violation of College policy, or disciplinary action. However, a complaint may be deemed to be formal if informal attempts to resolve an issue have failed or if the complainant states that they wish the complaint to be dealt with formally.

If a customer wishes to make a formal complaint, they can either:

- Complete a 'Customer Complaints Form' (Appendix 1). Forms are downloadable from the College website or available at reception.
- Email the College on complaints@swc.ac.uk

- 3.4.2 If the complaint relates to an academic matter, students have the right to contact and engage with the relevant Awarding Organisation directly, however Awarding Organisations will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's complaints policy.
- 3.4.3 If a customer wishes to complain verbally, they will be asked to confirm details of their complaint in writing.
- 3.4.4 If assistance is required with the completion of or the submission of a complaint, customers should speak to staff at Reception or Student Services or email complaints@swc.ac.uk
- 3.4.5 Complaints should be submitted to the College no later than three months from the date of the issue arising. In exceptional circumstances, the College may exercise discretion with this timescale.
- 3.4.6 Complaints may be submitted on behalf of someone else, for example a person under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult. In line with the requirements of current data protection legislation, consent of the individual may be required.

4. Dealing with the Complaint

- 4.1 All formal complaints will be forwarded to the relevant Responsible Owner² for an open and objective investigation. Upon completion of the investigation, a written response will be issued to the complainant. For the purposes of this Policy, the Responsible Owner² is defined as the individual appointed to investigate the complaint.
- 4.2 The College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed in the table below (Table 1).

² Responsible owners will be defined by SWC's Head of Quality and Student Engagement and will be of an appropriate level of seniority with no prior connection to the complaint.

Communication	Response Time
Complaint acknowledgement letter/email to customer	5 working days* from receipt of complaint
Letter/email issued to complainant if further information required to progress complaint	Clarification information to be returned within 10 working days of receipt
Complaint response letter/email to customer	20 working days** from date acknowledgement letter/email issued

Table 1: Timeframes for the handling of formal complaints

** Working days are those days on which the College is open. Weekends, statutory days, Bank Holidays, and other College closures are classed as ‘non-working’ days. Complaints specific to course admissions will be acknowledged within 2 working days from receipt of complaint.*

***Complaints specific to course admissions will be responded to within 5 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email is issued.*

- 4.3 If, for reasons beyond the College’s control the investigation and outcome exceeds, or is likely to exceed, the timeframes set out in Table 1, the customer will be notified in writing.
- 4.4 The investigation will be based on the information provided by the complainant at the time of making their initial complaint, together with any supplementary evidence obtained through the investigation.

5. Appeals

- 5.1 If a customer believes the College has not properly investigated their complaint, they have the right to appeal. Appeals should be submitted in writing, with full details of the grounds for appeal, to the Chief Executive.³
- 5.2 Following receipt of an appeal the College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed in Table 2 below. In exceptional circumstances, the College may exercise discretion with this timescale.

Communication	Response Time
Complainant submits appeal to the College	10 working days from date customer receives complaint response
Appeal acknowledgement letter/email to customer	5 working days from receipt of appeal from customer
Appeal response letter/email to customer	20 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email issued

Table 2: Timeframes for the handling of appeals

- 5.3 Appeals will be considered by an individual(s) with no previous connection to the original complaint. The individual(s) appointed to consider the appeal request will depend on the nature of the complaint and appeal lodged.
- 5.4 If, for reasons beyond the College's control the investigation and outcome exceeds the timeframe or is likely to exceed the timeframe, the customer will be notified in writing.

³ In the event a complaint made is about the Chief Executive, the Chair of the Audit Committee will appoint a suitable person to investigate and report. Any subsequent appeal will be addressed by the Governing Body.

6. Customer Communications

- 6.1 Complaint meetings and phone calls are confidential. If a meeting is required to resolve the issue, minutes will be taken and made available upon request to those in attendance. If the complainant identifies any inaccuracies the minute will be reviewed, and where an amendment is agreed a revised minute will be issued.
- 6.2 College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy the College does not consent to conversations being recorded unless express consent has been obtained in advance.

7. If a Customer Remains Dissatisfied

- 7.1 It is hoped that we will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints procedure. If the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the right to raise the matter with the Awarding Organisation (where applicable) or the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Office (NIPSO). The Awarding Organisation will normally only consider a complaint when the internal process has been exhausted.
- 7.2 The customer can complain to NIPSO however, NIPSO will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's customer complaints policy, and where it is received within six months of completing the College's complaints process. Contact details for the NIPSO are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast BT1 6HN

[Link to www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

- 7.3 Higher Education (HE) students may also have the right, in certain circumstances, to raise a complaint with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). Contact details for the CMA are:

Competition and Markets Authority
Victoria House
Southampton Row
London WC1B 4AD

[Link to Competition and Markets Authority](#)

- 7.4 If, and only when the College's internal processes have been exhausted, the student wishes to pursue any further appeal, they may do so directly with the Awarding Body or University. Awarding bodies and Universities have varying procedures in place for dealing with appeals. Students will be advised of their next steps and directed to the relevant personnel in the organisation concerned.

8. Quality Assurance

- 8.1 The College welcomes and values all feedback from customers. The College analyses feedback and areas of complaint to improve services. All complaints will be dealt with sensitively and in all cases the documentary evidence gathered and stored remains confidential to those involved. Statistical information will be made available for Quality and Equality monitoring purposes.

9. Data Protection

- 9.1 Information gathered in the management of complaint and compliments will be processed within the provisions of current Data Protection legislation. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a public task or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller, e.g., Public Authorities are accountable to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).
- 9.2 The customer's information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating the complaint (this may include the member of staff who is the subject of the complaint or compliment). The customer's information may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where

there is a lawful basis to do so. Further information on data protection and the individual's rights are available on our website. [Privacy & Data Protection | South West College \(swc.ac.uk\)](https://www.swc.ac.uk/privacy-and-data-protection)

10. Communication

10.1 This policy is available at [swc.ac.uk/discover/public-information/policies-procedures](https://www.swc.ac.uk/discover/public-information/policies-procedures) and is accessible in house via Gateway. It can also be made available, upon request, in alternative formats including large print, braille, audio and in minority languages.

11. Review

11.1 This Policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if required to reflect changes in legislation or circumstances.

Signed Principal and Chief Executive: 

Date: 15.04.26

Signed Chair of the Governing Body: 

Date: 15/04/2026

Appendix 1: Customer Complaints Form

If you require assistance with making a complaint, please speak to staff at Reception or Student Services or email complaints@swc.ac.uk. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, consistent with a full investigation of the issue.

If you are submitting a complaint on behalf of someone else, please provide their name/contact details in Section 1B. We may contact the individual for permission to discuss the issue with you.

This form should be returned to the Head of Quality and Student Engagement SWC Dungannon Campus, Circular Road, Dungannon, BT71 6BQ or emailed to complaints@swc.ac.uk

SECTION 1A – Complainant Details

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms/Other:
Name:	
Contact Address:	Telephone Number:
Email:	
Course (if applicable)	
Student ID (if applicable)	
Status (please tick which of the following applies. You are:	<input type="checkbox"/> A student (up to and including Level 3) <input type="checkbox"/> A student (Level 4 and above) <input type="checkbox"/> Parent or Guardian <input type="checkbox"/> Member of the Public <input type="checkbox"/> Employer <input type="checkbox"/> Organisation

SECTION 1B – Details of person on whose behalf you are submitting complaint, if different to above

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms /Other:
Name:	
Contact Address:	Telephone Number:
Email:	
Course (if applicable)	
Student ID (if applicable)	
Do you have their consent to raise this matter?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Status (please tick which of the following applies. You are:	A student (up to and including Level 3) A student (Level 4 and above) Parent or Guardian Member of the Public Employer Organisation

SECTION 2

Details of Complaint: Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time, and place of the event; and names of those involved. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.

Have you attempted to resolve this issue informally? Yes / No

If Yes, please summarise any action taken to resolve your issue/s to date.

What do you see as a suitable remedy to address the issue or matter raised?

Section 3

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulations and used for the purpose of investigating your complaint. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a “lawful basis” to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a public task or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller e.g., Public Authorities are subject to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is lawful bass to do so. For further guidance on how we hold your information please visit the Privacy Notice at [Link to privacy notice at www.swc.ac.uk/discover/public-information/data-protection](http://www.swc.ac.uk/discover/public-information/data-protection)

Please circle your response below:

I agree to be contacted by any method provided on this form in respect of my complaint.

Yes/No

I understand that a copy of this form may be shared with relevant College staff if they are the subject of the issue. Yes/No

I realise if I choose not to agree to these terms, the College will not be able to investigate my complaint. Yes/No

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Office Use Only

Date Received:
Date Acknowledged:
Received By:
Owner:

Appendix 2: Customer Compliments Form

If we have done something well, we value and appreciate your positive feedback. If you would like us to acknowledge your compliment, please provide either an email or postal address. If you provide both an email and postal address, we may contact you via either method.

If you require assistance with submitting a compliment, please speak to staff at Reception or Student Services or email compliments@swc.ac.uk. This form should be returned to the:

Head of Quality and Student Engagement SWC Dungannon Campus, Circular Road, Dungannon, BT71 6BQ or emailed to compliments@swc.ac.uk

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms Other:
Name:	
Contact Address:	Telephone Number
Email:	
Course (if applicable)	
Student ID (if applicable)	
Status (please tick which of the following applies. You are:	<input type="checkbox"/> A student (up to and including Level 3) <input type="checkbox"/> A student (Level 4 and above) <input type="checkbox"/> Parent or Guardian <input type="checkbox"/> Member of the Public <input type="checkbox"/> Employer <input type="checkbox"/> Organisation
Details of Compliment: Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time, and place of the event; and names of those involved if known. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.	

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulations and used for the purpose of

recording your compliment. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a “lawful basis” to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a public task or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller. Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of recording your compliment. Your information may be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is lawful bass to do so. For further guidance on how we hold your information please visit the Privacy Notice at [Link to Privacy Notice at www.swc.ac.uk/discover/public-information/data-protection](http://www.swc.ac.uk/discover/public-information/data-protection)

Please circle your response below:

I agree to be contacted by any method provided on this form in respect of my compliment

Yes/No

I realise if I choose not to agree to these terms, the College will not be able to record my compliment *Yes/No*

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Office Use Only

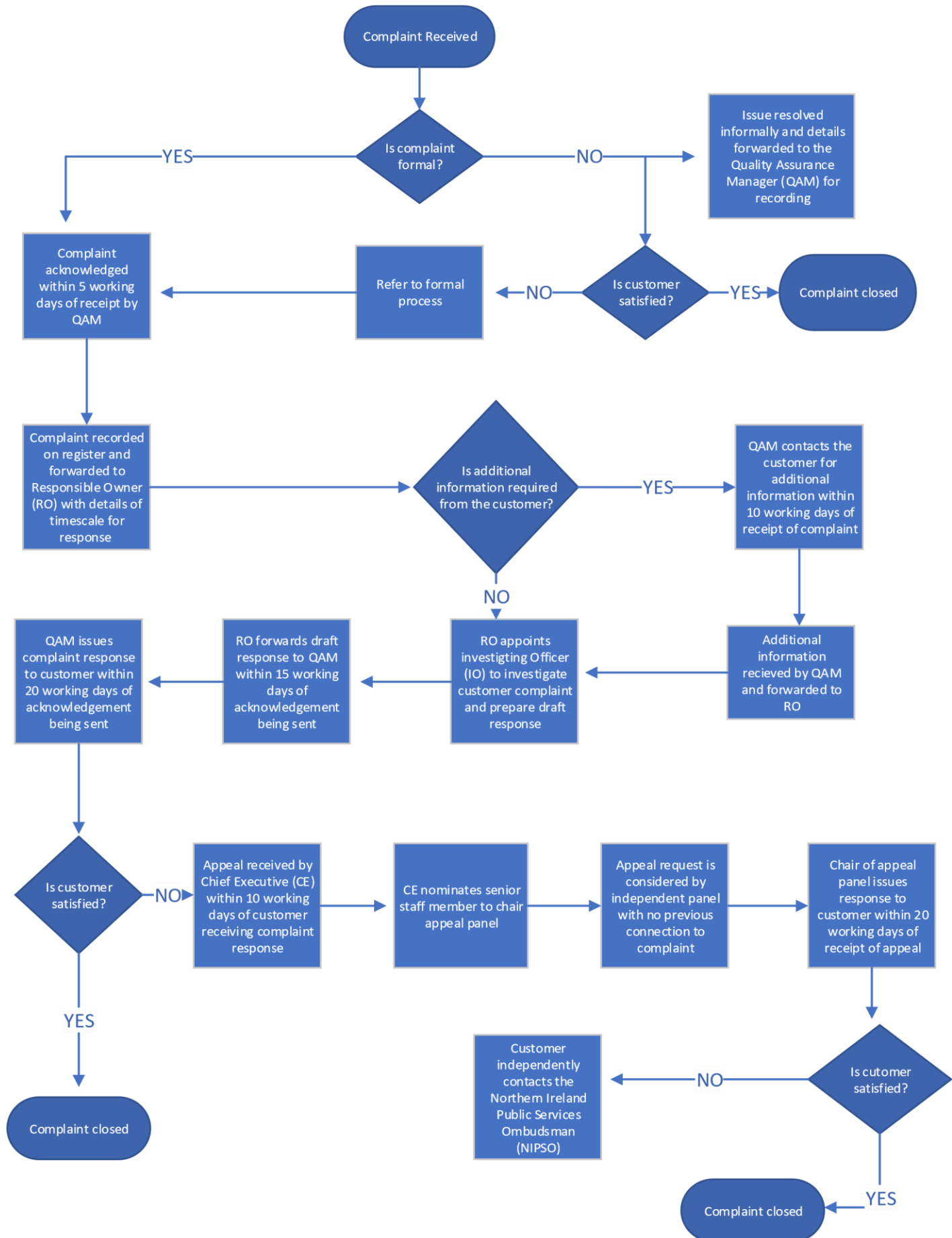
Date Received:

Date Acknowledged:

Received By:

Responsible Owner:

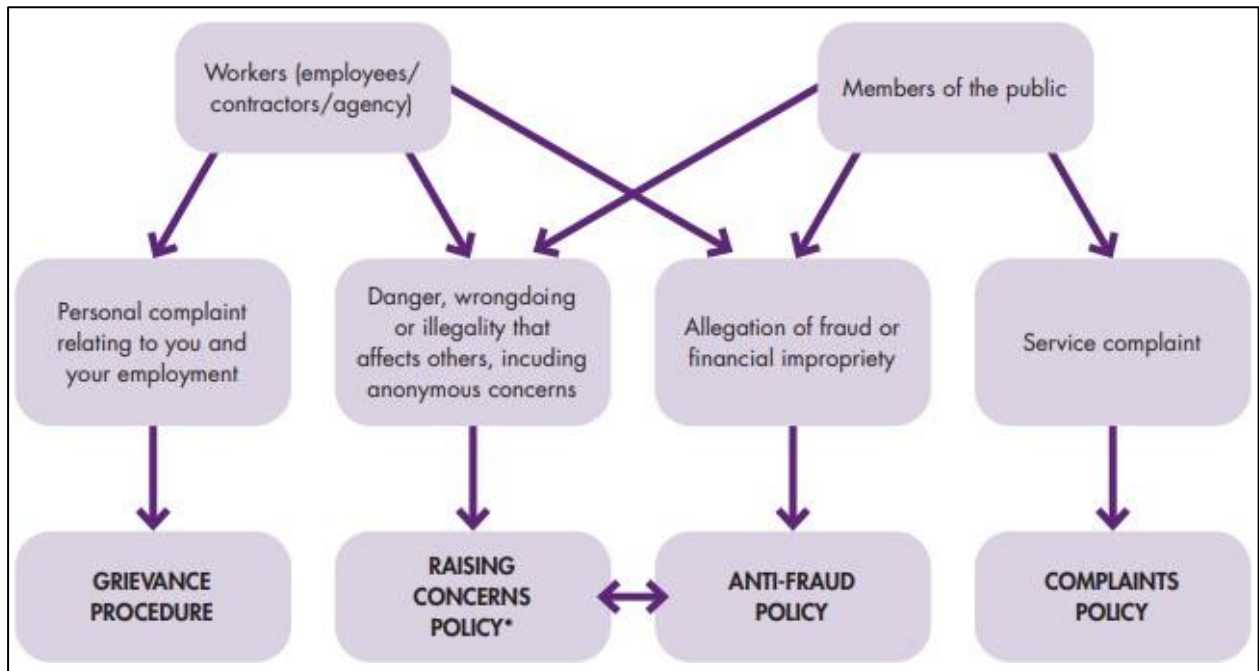
Appendix 3: Complaints Process



Appendix 4: Concern, Grievance or Complaint?

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Audit Office Guide 'Raising Concerns - A good practice guide for the Northern Ireland public sector'.

See diagram below and link to full document - [NIAO Good Practice Guide \(niauditoffice.gov.uk\)](http://niauditoffice.gov.uk)



Related Documentation

Title	Location	Owner
Freedom to Speak up: Raising a Concern Policy V3.1	Gateway	Risk & Compliance Officer
Customer Complaints and Compliments Procedure	Gateway	Head of Quality and Student Engagement

Change Log

Location	Change from deletion/addition	Change to
	No amends necessary	
	Equality screening undertaken	

Communication

Who needs to know (for action)	All Staff
Who needs to be aware	All Staff

Communication Plan

Action	By Whom	By When
Upload to Gateway	N Nugent	On approval
Circulation to key staff	B McIlduff	On approval

Document Development

Details of staff who were involved in the development of this policy:

Name	Role
Sector Working Group	Sector Wide
Carol Anne Deeny	Compliance & Legal Officer
Joanne Lucas	Risk & Compliance Officer

Details of staff, external groups or external organisations who were consulted in the development of this policy:

Name	Organisation	Date
Camilla James	SWC	12/1/23
Padraig McNamee	SWC	12/1/23
John Moss	SWC	12/1/23

Approval Dates

Approved by	Date
Governing Body	15 April 2026

Document History

Issue no. under review	Date of review:	Persons involved in review	Changes made after review? Yes/No If Yes refer to change log	New Issue No.	If changes made was consultation required?	If changes made was Equality Screening required?
	March 2015	CA Deeny	Yes			
	May- Sept 2016	Sector	N/A	1	Yes	
1	November 2017	Sector	Yes		No	
1	November 2018	Sector	Yes	1		
1	September 2020	J Lucas	Yes	02	No	No
02	January 2023	B McIlduff J Lucas	Yes	V3.0	No	No
V3.0	January 2024	B McIlduff	Yes	V3.1	No	No
V3.1	February 2026	B McIlduff	No	V3.2	N/A	N/A