

Bishop Auckland College and South West Durham Training (thereafter to be termed ‘the Group’) is committed to providing high quality customer service but recognises that there will inevitably be occasions when customers will be dissatisfied with an aspect of the Group’s provision or services. We value complaints and use the information from them to help us improve our services. For the full procedure please refer to Customer Complaint Procedure reference BAC-Q-05.

**Note:** for the purpose of this guidance a customer would include current students, potential / previous students, parent/carers, visitors, employers, staff, etc.

### **Scope of the customer complaints procedure**

This procedure is not to be used for the following matters, for which a separate procedure exists:

- Matters relating to assessment performance and issues of academic judgement, except where there is a complaint about service provided which needs to be resolved before an academic appeal decision can be made. The Group reserves the right to reclassify a complaint as an academic appeal or vice versa, if the submission has been made to the incorrect procedure, or the submission falls properly within the remit of one procedure rather than the other – Refer to Academic Appeals Procedure (ref: BAC-C-07).

**Note:** if a complaint and academic appeal are submitted at the same time and relate fundamentally to the same issue the academic appeal process will be paused until the Customer Complaints procedure has been concluded. Once the outcome to the complaint is known, this will be used to inform the Academic Appeals process.

**Note:** Complainants must go through the Group’s complaints process before they can escalate their complaint to an external organisation/partner such as a Validating Institution, Awarding Organisation, Funding Body or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

**Note:** For students studying on an Open University validated programme, students who wish to make a complaint must refer to the complaints policy for Open University students (POL-OU-02) [bacoll.ac.uk/higher-education](http://bacoll.ac.uk/higher-education)

### **Complaints Process**

Our Customer Complaint Process has **4 stages (3 formal stages)**

- **Early Resolution / Informal Complaint**  
Early Resolution is designed to address straightforward concerns swiftly and locally. Where appropriate you should discuss your concerns first with your tutor or an appropriate member of staff. It is really important that you raise your concerns as soon as possible, and no more than 28 days of the issue occurring or being notified of a decision. Staff dealing with an informal complaint must endeavour to inform you of the outcome, with 10 working days.
- **Formal Complaint Stage**  
If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of early resolution, or where early resolution is not possible or suitable due to the nature, complexity or seriousness of the matter, you can make a formal complaint. It is really important that you make your complaint as soon as possible, and no longer than 28 days after the event or being informed of the outcome of an informal complaint.
- **Appeal (First Stage)**  
If you are not completely satisfied with the outcome of the formal complaint you can appeal. Your Appeal will be reviewed by an Independent Appeal Panel.
- **Appeal (Second Stage)** Reviewed by Principal/Chief Executive.

### **Who can complain?**

Anyone who is dissatisfied with our service can make a complaint to the Group. We understand that you may be unable or reluctant, to make a complaint yourself. We will accept complaints from a friend relative or advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain on your behalf.

*Please note: the Group may decline to accept complaints from a third party, unless they are acting as a complainant's representative and evidence to prove this is provided in the form of a signed declaration.*

Where an issue raised affects a number of individuals, those individuals can submit a group complaint. In such circumstances the name of each individual must still be provided but the group may be asked to nominate one individual to act as group representative. It may be that communication will be made through the representative with the expectation for them to liaise with the other individuals.

### **How do I complain?**

You can complain in person, by phone, in writing, by email or by using our online complaints form: <https://bacoll.ac.uk/complaints/>

### **Contact information**

**Address:** Quality Improvement Office, Bishop Auckland College, Woodhouse Lane, Bishop Auckland, DL14 6JZ

**Email:** [Quality@bacoll.ac.uk](mailto:Quality@bacoll.ac.uk)

**Phone:** 01388 443069

### **When making a complaint what information must I provide?**

When you make your complaint, make sure you inform us of:

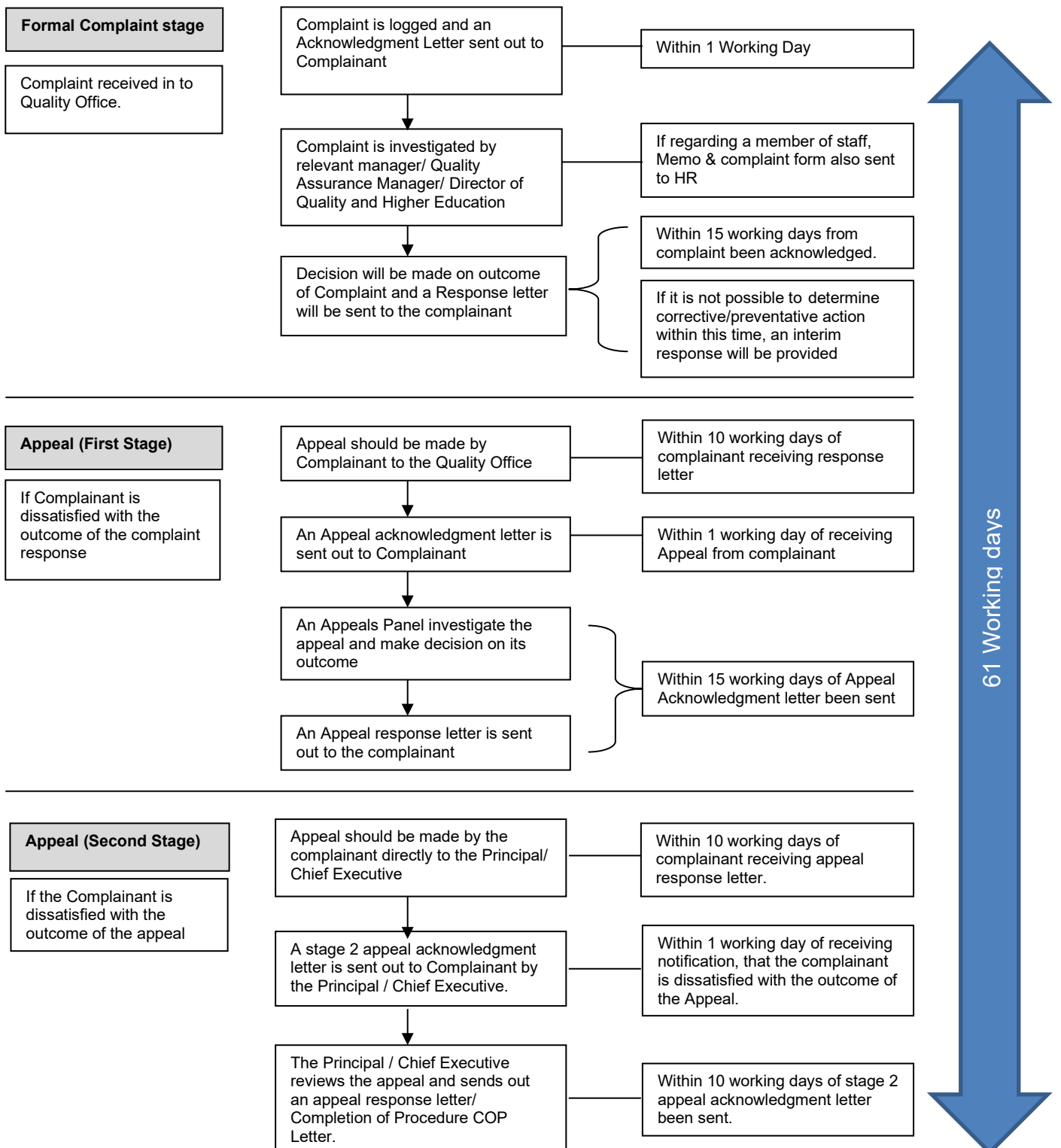
- Your full name, address, telephone number and email address (if applicable)
- As much as you can about the complaint as possible, including dates and times etc.
- What has gone wrong, including any supporting evidence to substantiate the issues raised. Where possible, this may include copies of emails, witness statements, etc. If your complaint is regarding several issues please be sure to separate them out, this will help us to respond properly to your complaint.
- The outcome you are seeking – if your complaint covers several issues outline for each issue the outcome you are seeking.

*Note: regarding anonymous complaints – it is the Group's Policy for the complainant to provide their full name and contact details, in order for the Group to fully investigate a complaint. However, if there is a compelling case, supported by evidence, the matter may be investigated. It must be noted however, that raising a concern anonymously may impede the investigation and communication of the outcome.*

**What happens when you complain?**

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint. An overview of the formal complaints process is laid out below and a link to the Group’s Customer Complaints Procedure is available on the website.

**The Stages of the formal Complaint Process**



Please note that working days do not include weekends or bank holidays. Occasionally this deadline may have to be extended to allow for key staff absence or establishment closure, for example, but under normal circumstances the Group will strive to meet the deadlines as outlined above.

### **Grounds on which you can appeal**

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal complaints stage, you can request to appeal on the following grounds:

- Review a procedure followed at the formal stage
- Consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable
- New material evidence which the complainant was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process

### **Confidentiality**

Please be assured that your complaint will be dealt with in confidence and only shared with staff who need to know in order to investigate and respond to the issues you've raised. You should note, however, that any person identified in a complaint or involved in making a decision you are querying, will be given the right to reply.

### **What if I am still dissatisfied?**

After we have fully investigated/reviewed your complaint, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint you can complain to:

- **For complaints relating to Further Education (FE) courses** – Depending on the nature of the complaint you can contact either the relevant awarding organisation or the Department of Education (DfE). For further information about making a complaint please refer to the DfE customer help portal. Details are provided below:

<https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/>

- **For complaints relating to HNC/HND courses solely ran through the Group** you can complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). You must do this within 12 months of receiving the Completion of Procedures (COP) letter from the Group.

You can fill in the OIA's complaint form online or download a copy from the OIA website:  
<http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx>

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. For further information about the OIA's scheme and the complaints they can and can't look at, please refer to their website  
<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>

### **Retention of your data**

Information obtained in regards to the processing or investigation of a complaint and any associated appeal will be retained by the Group for the current academic year, plus 6 years.