



CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY

Policy Owner: Risk and Compliance Officer (FE Sector Policy)

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Equality Screening Date: 06 June 2016

Date of First Issue: March 2015

Date of Next Review: September 2022

Location: Gateway and SWC website

Related Documentation

Title	Location	Owner
Customer Complaints and Compliments Procedure	Gateway	

Change Log

Location	Change from deletion/addition	Change to
		Document updated to new SWC policy format
Throughout	Change: Carol Anne Deeny Legal and Compliance Officer	Joanne Lucas Risk and Compliance Officer
Throughout	Change: Principal and Chief Executive	Chief Executive
Page 2	Change: "This document can also be produced in alternative formats upon request"	"South West College is committed to providing publications that are accessible to all. To request additional copies of this publication in a different format please contact:
	Change: 1.0 Policy Statement	1.0 Purpose
2.4	Addition: "Staff complaints which fall under separate employment policies & procedures"	
3.0	Change: Categories of Customer Feedback	3.0 Definitions
3.2	Addition: "or by email"	
3.3.5	Addition: " In line with the requirements of current data protection legislation"	
4.0	Change: Appeals	4.0 Customer Communication
5.0	Change: Customer Communication	4.0 Appeals
6.1	Addition: "with the Awarding Organisation (where applicable) or"	
6.1	Addition: "The Awarding Organisation will normally only consider a complaint when the internal process has been exhausted."	
6.3	Addition: "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:"	
6.4	Addition: "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."	

Location	Change from deletion/addition	Change to
7.0	Change: Monitoring Complaints and Compliments	7.0 Quality Assurance
7.2	<p>Addition: “The following processes must be followed to monitor and review this document: It will be monitored on an ongoing basis and subject to a full review at least every two years. It may also be updated if changes or improvements in processes or procedures are identified. In monitoring and reviewing the document, the following will be taken into consideration: feedback regarding the content and format of the document; uptake and usage; comments or complaints regarding the document; Equality information and monitoring data.”</p>	
Appendix 1	Addition: question in Section 1B ““Do you have their consent to raise this matter?” Yes/ No	
Appendix 1	Inclusion of GDPR statement	

Communication

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

Communication Plan

Action	By Whom	By When
Upload approved document to Gateway and website	J Lucas	Immediately after approval
Circulate complaints process to all staff	J Lucas	Immediately after approval
Ensure complaints and compliments forms uploaded to Gateway and website	J Lucas	Immediately after approval

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Policy Purpose

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.

A complaint may be defined as '*A statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.*' [Link to the definition of complaint in the Oxford Dictionary](#)

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 in order 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.

Policy Scope

For the purposes of this policy, a customer may be a student, external customer, member of the public or third party stakeholder.

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.

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.

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.

Definitions

Compliments and Comments

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:

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

Informal Complaint

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.

Formal Complaint

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

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.

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

If a customer wishes to complain verbally, they will be asked to confirm details of their complaint in writing.

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

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.

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.

Dealing with the Complaint

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 Owner is defined as the individual appointed to investigate the complaint

The College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1 Timeframes for the handling of formal complaints

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

**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.*

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.

Appeals

If a customer is dissatisfied with the College response to 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

Following receipt of an appeal the College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed in the table below.

² Responsible owners are defined by SWC's Risk and Compliance Officer

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.

Table 2 Timeframes for the handling of appeals

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

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.

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.

Customer Communications

Telephone communications

The recording of telephone conversations for the purposes of distribution to and use by any third party, without consent, is a breach of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy, the College does not consent to telephone calls being recorded, unless express consent has been obtained.

Face-to-Face communications

Complaint meetings are confidential. If a meeting is required to resolve the issue, minutes/a record will be taken and made available upon request to those in attendance. If the complainant identifies any inaccuracies, the minute /record will be reviewed, and where an amendment is agreed a revised minute /record will be issued. As minutes/records will be kept, recordings of the meeting or conversations in relation to the complaint are not required. College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy, the College does not consent to recording of complaints meetings, unless express consent has been obtained.

If a Customer Remains Dissatisfied

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.

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)

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority>

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.

Quality Assurance

The College welcomes and values all feedback from customers. The College analyses feedback and areas of complaint in order 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.

Communication

This policy is available at 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.

Review

The following processes must be followed to monitor and review this document:

- It will be monitored on an ongoing basis and subject to a full review at least every two years.
- It may also be updated if changes or improvements in processes or procedures are identified.

In monitoring and reviewing the document, the following will be taken into consideration:

- feedback regarding the content and format of the document;
- uptake and usage;
- comments or complaints regarding the document;
- Equality information and monitoring data.



Signed Chief Executive

Date 16/09/2020



Signed Chair of the Board of Governors

Date 16/09/2020

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 Risk and Compliance Officer SWC, Burn Road, Cooks town, BT80 8DN 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:	A student (up to and including Level 3) A student (Level 4 and above) Parent or Guardian Member of the Public Employer 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.

Section 3

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

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 eg 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 basis 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:

Risk and Compliance Officer SWC, Burn Road, Cookstown BT80 8DN 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:	A student (up to and including Level 3) A student (Level 4 and above) Parent or Guardian Member of the Public Employer 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 basis 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:

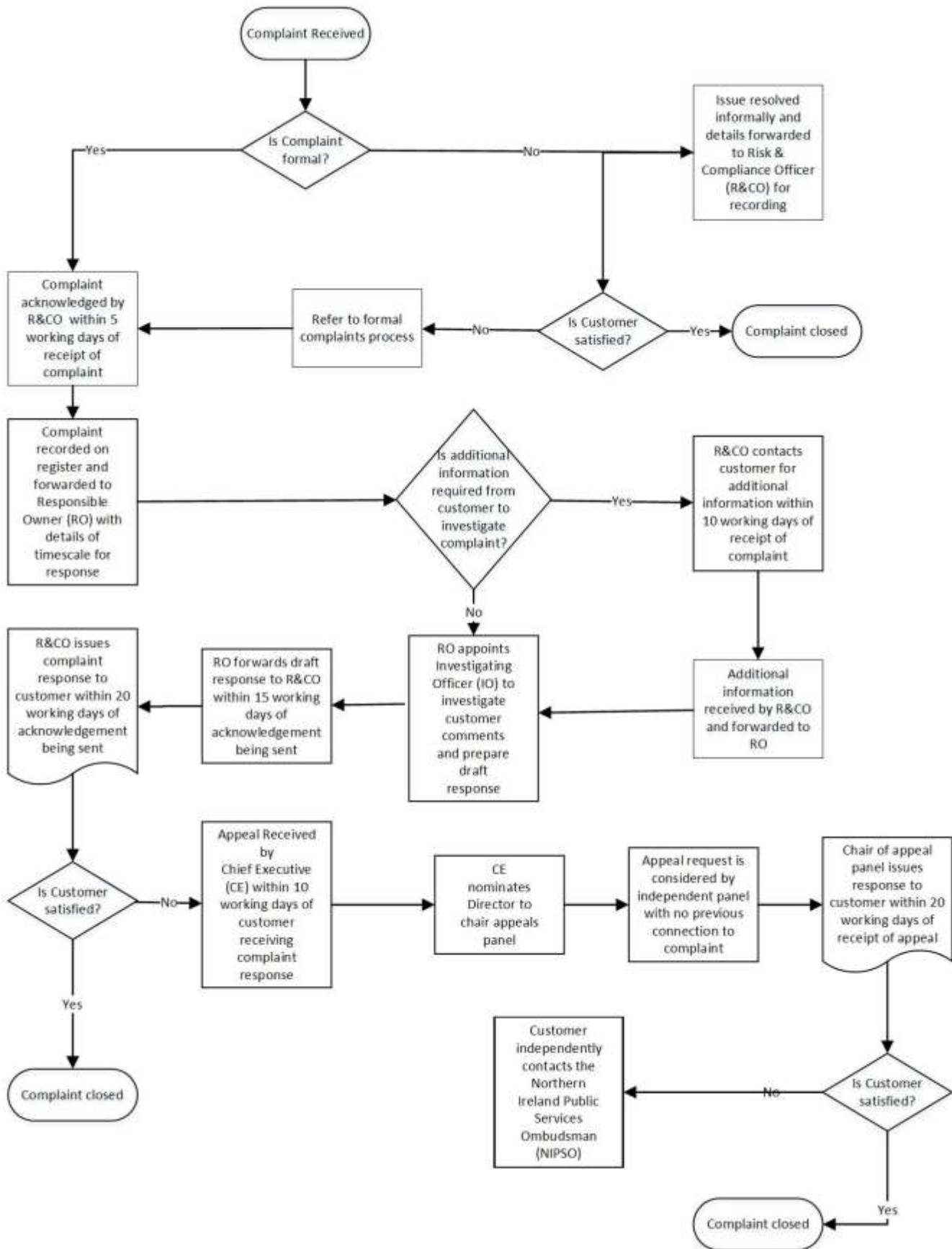
I agree to be contacted by any method provided on this form in respect of my compliment Yes/No

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: _____

<u>Office Use Only</u>
Date Received:
Date Acknowledged:
Received By:
Responsible Owner:

APPENDIX 3 COMPLAINTS PROCESS



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
N/A		

Approval Dates

Approved by	Date
Policy Oversight and Management Group	N/A
Senior Management Team	8 September 2020
Governing Body	16 September 2020

Document History

Issue no. under review	Date of review:	Persons involved in review	Changes made after review? Yes/No	If changes have been made, please provide brief details:	New Issue No.	If changes made was consultation required?	If changes made was Equality Screening required?
	March 2015	CA Deeny	Yes	College Policy and Procedure Updated			
	May- Sept 2016	Sector	N/A	New sector Policy and Procedure created	1	Yes	
1	November 2017	Sector	Yes	Reference to academic appeals inserted. Complainants advised re right to contact awarding bodies directly, paragraph inserted regarding recording of meetings /conversations. Timescale for NIPSO referral inserted and complaint forms amended		No	
1	November 2018	Sector	Yes	College Policy and Procedure Updated	1		
1	September 2020	J Lucas	Yes	Refer to Change Summary Log	2	No	No