Policy/Procedure/Guideline Review

Policy/Procedure/ Guideline:	**Complaints Policy and Procedure**
Senior Manager Responsible:	Assistant Principal Finance and HR
Author:	Assistant Principal Finance and HR Executive Assistant- SLT Support
Approved By:	SLT Corporation Board
Date Approved:	SLT – 08 September 2026 Board – 21 October 2026
Next Review Date:	Annual
Publication:	Staff Hub Group and College Websites
Changes Made:	Amended references to 'Group' rather than 'College' Tightened references to anonymous and malicious complaints Included 'reasonable adjustments' clause in line with Equality Act 2010 Included new proportionate complaints management provisions and procedures, including new 'Complaints Clarity and Scope', 'Clarification and Scope Definition Stage' and 'Managing Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour' sections Updated appendices and included new templates Included new references to awarding body procedures regarding complaints Strengthened wording regarding monitoring activities Other revisions to ensure we are compliant with OfS and OIA requirements Revised 'legal representation' provisions to ensure we are compliant with equality act and ombudsman expectations

Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

1.1 East Lancashire Learning Group, which incorporates Nelson and Colne College, Lancashire Adult Learning and Accrington and Rossendale College ('the Group') is committed to continuous improvement and providing a high standard of service ensuring that any complaints received are addressed in an open, transparent manner to the satisfaction of all parties involved. The outcomes from complaints support continuous improvement.

1.2 The Group welcomes the opportunity to receive and respond to comments and/or suggestions in a prompt and courteous manner.

2. Our Commitment

2.1 The Group will ensure that all complaints accepted under this procedure are dealt with promptly, fairly, professionally and in a non-discriminatory manner, and that appropriate action is taken. Complaints will be taken seriously and viewed positively as an opportunity to receive constructive feedback so that improvements may be made.

2.2 All complaints will be treated as confidential to safeguard interests and information limited to those involved in the complaints process.

2.3 The outcomes of any complaint will be shared with the complainant and any Group staff involved. Complaints made which, on investigation, turn out to be malicious, may result in disciplinary or other further action.

2.4 The Group will consider reasonable adjustments to the complaints process where required under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure accessibility and fairness.

2.5 Individuals will not be disadvantaged for raising a genuine complaint in good faith.

2.6 We are committed to:

- **Taking all complaints seriously** – Whatever the subject of the complaint may be, by complaining the person concerned has attached value to the subject and this will be respected by the member(s) of staff involved.

- **Clearly communicating** – If the complaint cannot be resolved immediately, the complainant should be informed about the complaint's progress.

- **Remaining professional** – In an organisation with a high degree of face-to-face contact, it is perhaps inevitable that there will be a proportion of complaints relating to staff. In this case the complaint will always move to Stage 2 of the process to involve the HR Manager.

- **Referring to a formal process** – If a complaint cannot be dealt with informally or if the complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome the complaint will be moved to Stage 2 of the process.

3. Scope

3.1 This policy and associated procedure applies to all people served by the Group including students, parents, customers, employers, local residents and visitors who wish to comment on or express dissatisfaction with any aspect of the Group's activities including those activities delivered on behalf of the Group by a subcontractor. Former students are expected to raise any concerns within three months of completing, withdrawing from, being withdrawn from, or otherwise ending their course of study.

3.2 However, this policy does not deal with:

- Dissatisfaction about the outcome of an academic misconduct or disciplinary process.
- Concerns relating to assessment decisions, grading, certification or academic judgement associated with qualifications issued by awarding organisations or end-point assessment organisations, which may be subject to separate appeals or complaints procedures.
- A concern about a decision made under other specific regulations, such as fitness to practice.
- Matters relating to the Student Loans Company, which has its own complaints procedures.

3.3 The Group will not normally investigate anonymous complaints unless there is compelling evidence or safeguarding concerns that require investigation. Anonymous complaints may limit the Group's ability to investigate or respond fully.

3.4 Complaints which are determined, following assessment, to be malicious, abusive or intentionally misleading may result in the complaint process being discontinued and may lead to disciplinary or other appropriate action.

3.5 The Group may apply proportionate complainant management measures where complaint behaviour becomes unreasonable, excessive or unreasonably persistent.

3.6 Complaints against the actions of the Corporation or its Members should be referred to the Clerk to the Board of Corporation. Further details and a Board Complaints form are available on the Group and College websites.

3.7 Any incidents that may be related to safeguarding or radicalisation must be reported to the Safeguarding Team.

3.8 Complaints from registered Higher Education students about their HE academic experience will normally be considered under the Higher Education Student Complaints Policy and Procedure. Where the complaint is made by a former student, relates primarily to staff conduct, service delivery, or matters outside the scope of the HE Student Complaints Policy, the Group may determine the most appropriate procedure following an initial scope assessment.

3.9 Complaints that involve allegations of serious wrongdoing or misconduct that are of public interest will be dealt with under the Whistleblowing Policy which can be found on the Group's website.

4. Complaint Clarity and Scope

4.1 Complainants should, wherever possible, clearly identify:

- The specific matter(s) being complained about;
- The key issues to be investigated;
- The impact on the complainant; and
- The outcome or resolution sought.

4.2 Complaints should be concise, factual and focused on relevant matters.

4.3 Where a complaint is unclear, excessively lengthy, contains multiple unrelated issues, or includes excessive or repetitive supporting material, the Group may request clarification or require the complainant to summarise the key matters to be investigated before the formal process progresses.

4.4 The Group reserves the right to determine the scope of the complaint investigation and may decline to investigate matters that are outside the scope of this policy, repetitive, or not material to the outcome of the complaint.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 If the complaint is about a course or a service offered by the Group, the manager of the area concerned will be responsible for investigating the complaint. If the complaint relates to that manager, then the Assistant Principal Finance and HR will assign an independent manager to investigate the complaint.

5.2 The Chief Executive/Principal or Deputy Principal, or their nominee will deal with and hear all appeals against the outcomes of complaints.

5.3 If the complaint is against the Chief Executive/Principal or a member of the Senior Leadership team, then either the Principal (if not the subject of the complaint) or a member of the Board of Corporation will hear the appeal.

5.4 The Assistant Principal Finance and HR has overall responsibility for the Complaints Policy and Procedure and may nominate another person to investigate a complaint where there is a conflict of interest.

5.5 The Senior Leadership Support team is responsible for recording, monitoring and seeing through to conclusion all complaints. The Senior Leadership Support team also produces termly complaints reports for review by the Assistant Principal Finance and HR on behalf of the Senior Leadership team and an annual complaints report for the Board of Corporation.

6. Dissemination

6.1 A copy of this policy and procedure can be found on:

- East Lancashire Learning Group website,
- Nelson and Colne College website,
- Lancashire Adult Learning website,
- Accrington and Rossendale College website,
- East Lancashire Apprenticeships website
- East Lancashire UC website
- The Staff Hub

7. Monitoring and Review

7.1 The policy and operation of the procedure will be monitored and reviewed by East Lancashire Learning Group's Assistant Principal Finance and HR.

7.2 An overview analysis of complaints received by the Group is provided to Senior Leaders and the Board of Corporation. The Group will use complaints data and outcomes to inform service improvement, staff development and quality assurance activity.

8. Related Policies/Procedures

8.1 Documents related to the policy are:

- Complaints and Comments Procedure
- Appendix 1 – Complaints Guidance
- Appendix 2 – Complaints Form template
- Appendix 3 – Scope Letter template
- Appendix 4 – Process Chart
- Grievance Policy and Procedure for Staff
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- Higher Education Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

9. Management Responsibility

9.1 The Assistant Principal Finance and HR has management responsibility for this policy across the Group.

Complaints and Comments Procedure

How to Make a Complaint or Comment

Complaints and Comments/Suggestions can be made verbally, by telephone, email, letter or by completing a Complaints or Comments Form available on the Group website: https://eastlancslearning.ac.uk/compliments-and-complaints/

Comments will be recorded and forwarded to the appropriate Manager for review, action and follow up as necessary. Where no action is required, this will be noted as the outcome.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaints

Issues that appear straight forward and potentially easily resolved may be directed to any relevant member of staff to seek an early resolution. Students are encouraged to resolve any issues of dissatisfaction with their course tutor so that this may be dealt with quickly and informally.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaints

Where a complaint cannot be resolved satisfactorily through the informal route or in cases of more serious issues, these may be lodged as a formal complaint by completing a Complaints or Comments form available on the Group websites. Any concerns relating to young people and adults with additional needs who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, e.g. by neglect, physical injury, sexual abuse or emotional abuse or any aspect of bullying, harassment or coercion will be directed to the Safeguarding team, as a safeguarding issue.

The complainant should provide:

- a summary of the complaint;
- the key issues to be investigated;
- relevant dates and facts;
- details of any steps already taken to resolve the matter; and
- the outcome sought.

The Group may request additional clarification before progressing the complaint investigation.

Acknowledge, Record and Monitor

All formal complaints will be recorded, acknowledged within five working days and monitored until conclusion within the Senior Leadership Support team.

A central log of complaints and appeals against complaints outcomes is maintained and monitored by the Assistant Principal Finance and HR. An overview analysis of complaints received by the Group is provided to Senior Leaders and the Board of Corporation. Complaint reporting will include themes, trends, equality considerations, lessons learned and actions taken to support service improvement. The Senior Leadership Support team is responsible for logging all complaints and providing these reports.

All complaints will be monitored for issues of discrimination. Where such issues are identified, the complaint record will be updated, appropriate actions instigated, and the matter will be brought to the attention of the Assistant Principal Finance and HR.

Clarification and Scope Definition Stage

Following acknowledgement of a formal complaint, the Group may undertake an initial assessment to:

- clarify the complaint;
- identify the issues to be investigated;
- determine whether matters fall within scope; and
- identify whether issues should be considered separately.

The Group may issue a written scope statement confirming the matters accepted for investigation.

Investigation

The Line Manager or Head of Division will be assigned as the Manager to investigate the formal complaint. When complaints are raised against staff the investigation will involve the HR Manager and will be conducted by an individual who is independent of the situation. Where a conflict of interests is identified the Assistant Principal Finance and HR will assign an independent Manager to conduct the investigation.

The Investigating Manager will update the complainant with the findings of their investigation. During this stage, the complainant may be contacted for further information or may be invited to meet with the Investigating Manager.

Where the complainant is invited to attend a meeting, they may be accompanied by a friend or relative, but the accompanying person will not take an active part in the meeting.

Legal representation is not normally necessary or appropriate within the Group's complaints process. However, the Group reserves the right to consider requests for legal representation in exceptional circumstances.

Investigations will be conducted in a fair, proportionate and timely manner. The Group will focus on the substantive issues raised and may decline to respond individually to repetitive, irrelevant or immaterial matters.

Outcome

Managers will provide written details of the action taken and the outcome of the complaint and forward a copy of this, with supporting documents attached to the Senior Leadership Support Team.

Following the investigation, the Investigating Manager will provide a written response to the complainant within twenty working days, unless otherwise advised. Where timescales cannot reasonably be met, the complainant will be informed of the reasons for the delay and revised timescales.

Where a complaint relates to the requirements, decisions or processes of an awarding organisation or end-point assessment organisation, the Group may refer the complainant to the relevant external organisation's procedures where appropriate.

Stage 3 - Appeal

The complainant has the right to appeal against the outcome of the complaint. This should be lodged with the Senior Leadership Support Team within ten working days of receipt of correspondence stating the outcome of the investigation into the formal complaint. The grounds of appeal and any actions sought must be clearly stated at the time of making the appeal. The Chief Executive and Principal or Deputy Chief Executive, or their nominee, will review the formal investigation and consider whether:

- New evidence or circumstances have become known, which could not have reasonably been made known at the time of the complaint.
- The investigation was not conducted fairly or as per Procedure and this affected the outcome.
- The decision and outcome of the complaint were unreasonable.

We aim to conclude the Appeal process normally within twenty working days and will contact the complainant with the outcome. This decision constitutes the final stage of the Group Complaints Policy and Procedure.

If the complaint is not resolved to satisfaction of the complainant, the following further avenues of communication are available through the relevant external agencies:

Further Education:
Department for Education (DfE)
OFSTED

Relevant awarding organisations or end-point assessment organisations, where complaints relate to qualification delivery, assessment or certification matters.

Higher Education:
Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) - Where a complaint from a Higher Education student or former Higher Education student falls within the remit of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, and the Group's internal procedures have been completed, the Group will issue a Completion of Procedures letter in accordance with OIA requirements.

Confidentiality and Support

All complaints will be treated as confidential to safeguard interests and information limited to those involved in the complaints process.

If in exceptional cases and for justifiable reasons the complainant wishes to remain anonymous throughout the process, this may be considered. However, if disclosures are made it may be necessary to share information, and this must be explained to the complainant.

Complainants who feel that they need help and/or support to make a complaint may wish to talk to the Student Services team.

Managing Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

The Group is committed to handling complaints fairly, proportionately and respectfully. However, in a small number of cases, complainant behaviour may become unreasonable or unreasonably persistent and may affect the Group's ability to investigate matters effectively.

Examples of unreasonable complainant behaviour may include:

- repeatedly raising the same issues after the complaints process has concluded;
- excessive, repetitive or disproportionate correspondence;
- continually introducing new issues during an ongoing investigation;
- refusal to engage with reasonable requests for clarification; or
- abusive, offensive or intimidating behaviour towards staff.

Where complainant behaviour is considered unreasonable, the Group may take proportionate steps to manage the process effectively. This may include:

- limiting communication to a single point of contact;
- requesting communication in writing only;
- declining to respond to repetitive correspondence that raises no new substantive issues; or
- bringing the complaints process to a close where all reasonable steps have been exhausted.

Any measures taken under this section will be proportionate, reasonable and communicated to the complainant in writing.

Appendix 1 Complaint Guidance

To support a fair and timely investigation, complainants are encouraged to:

- provide a concise summary;
- identify key issues;
- provide relevant evidence only;
- avoid repetition; and
- clearly state the outcome sought.

The Group may request clarification where complaints are unclear or excessively lengthy.

The form at appendix 2 can be utilised to aid submission of a complaint.

A scope letter (appendix 3 – template) may be issued where a complaint contains multiple issues, lacks clarity, includes excessive or repetitive information, or where the Group considers it necessary to define the matters to be investigated before the formal investigation progresses.

Appendix 2 – Complaints Form

Section 1 – Complainant Details

Name:	
Student ID *(If applicable)*	
Person Making the Complaint/ Relationship to the Group	Student
	Parent / Carer/ Guardian
	Employer
	Visitor / Customer
	Member of the Public
	Former Student
	Other
Contact Details:	Email:
	Telephone:
Preferred method of contact:	

Section 2 – Complaint Summary

Please provide a brief summary of your complaint.

(Recommended maximum 500 words)

Section 3 – Issues to be Investigated

Please identify the key issues you would like the Group to investigate.

Issue 1:

Issue 2:

Issue 3:

(Please only include additional issues where they are directly related.)

Section 4 – Relevant Dates and Individuals

Please provide any relevant dates and the names of individuals involved.

Section 5 – Steps Already Taken

Please tell us what steps you have already taken to resolve this matter informally.

Section 6 – Impact

How has this matter affected you?

Section 7 – Outcome Sought

What outcome are you seeking?

Examples: explanation / apology / review of decision / service improvement / reimbursement / other

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Section 8 – Supporting Evidence

Please list any evidence attached.

Examples: emails / letters / screenshots/ meeting notes / witness statements

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Section 9 – Declaration

I confirm that the information provided is accurate to the best of my knowledge and relates to matters relevant to this complaint.

Signed:

Date:

For details on how we use the personal information you provide on this form please visit.

Please return this form to

Complaints
Nelson & Colne College
Scotland Road
Nelson
BB9 7YT

Or Email:
slt.support@eastlancslearning.ac.uk

Complaints
Accrington and Rossendale College
Broad Oak Road
Accrington
BB5 2AW

Or Email:
slt.support@eastlancslearning.ac.uk

We will let you know that we have received your form, and will normally reply within 20 working days, detailing the outcome of the investigation. Some complaints may take longer, in which case we will let you know and keep you up to date on what we are doing.

Appendix 3 – Scope Letter Template

Complaint Scope Confirmation

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your complaint received on [date].

Following an initial review of the information provided, the Group has undertaken a preliminary assessment in accordance with its Complaints Policy and Procedure.

To support a fair, proportionate and timely investigation, the Group has identified the following matters as being within the scope of the formal complaint investigation.

Issues Accepted for Investigation

1. [Issue]
2. [Issue]
3. [Issue]

Matters Outside Scope

The following matters will not form part of the investigation:

- [Issue]
- [Issue]

These matters are outside the scope of the Complaints Policy and Procedure because they:

- have already been considered under a previous investigation;
- fall under another policy or procedure;
- relate to assessment decisions or academic judgement;
- relate to an external awarding organisation; or
- do not contain sufficient information to enable investigation.

(Delete as appropriate)

Further Information Required

To assist the investigation, please provide the following information by [date]:

- [Information required]

OR

No further clarification is required at this stage.

Investigation Process

The investigation will focus on the issues identified above.

The Group aims to provide a written response within the timescales set out in the Complaints Policy and Procedure. Where this is not possible, you will be notified of the reasons and revised timescales.

If you believe any issue has been misunderstood or omitted from the scope of the investigation, please notify us in writing within five working days of receipt of this letter.

Yours sincerely

[Name]

[Job Title]

East Lancashire Learning Group

Appendix 4 Process Chart

