

College Policies and Procedures

**The Compliments and Complaints
Procedure**

**John Hayles
Deputy Principal
February 2009
Updated September 2011, April and June 2012 and
November 2013**

The Compliments and Complaints Procedure

Policies and Procedures made by the Principal and Chief Executive under Delegated Authority from the Corporation

These policies and procedures are made by the Principal and Chief Executive of the College using the powers delegated by the Corporation in accordance with the Instrument and Articles of Government.

They are intended to ensure that the matters concerned are not only conducted fairly, appropriately and in accordance with the law where required, but also promote the purposes of the College and its customers.

The policies and procedures may be revised or amended from time to time in the light of experience or changing circumstances.

If you have any observations on these policies and procedures, please write to the Principal and Chief Executive.


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Angela O'Donoghue
Principal and Chief Executive

Date06.09.12.....

This Policy is available in other languages and formats upon request by telephoning the College on 0845 52 12345. This document refers to communication in writing throughout, however, we are happy to use any preferred method of communication.

Equality Impact Assessment

Date of Equality Impact Assessment	April 2012
Name of policy, practice, process or procedure	The Compliments & Complaints Procedure
What is the main aim or purpose of the policy, practice, process or procedure?	To provide customers with the opportunity to make a complaint or compliment
Who is responsible for creating/implementing this? Please state job role	Tracy Espinosa Quality Improvement Officer (Customer Service and Research)
Names of staff, learners, stakeholders involved in the equality impact assessment process	John Hayles, Derrick Griffiths, Tracy Espinosa, Sharon Cousins

Information to support the impact assessment process

What evidence is already available to help inform the impact assessment process and to promote the general and specific duties related to equality and diversity? (Consider both quantitative and qualitative information)	Previous Compliments and Complaints Procedure College E & D Policy Feedback from Surveys Impact Assessment Training Policies & Procedures from other Colleges
In what areas are there concerns that the policy, practice, process or procedure could have a differential impact? (Please circle or highlight)	Religion and Belief, Disability, Other
What are the risks associated with the policy, practice, process or procedure in relation to the differential impact?	Not easily understood if only in one format. Only used by certain groups. The procedure for reporting and categorising complaints on a database by main issue may not identify all complaints that may be linked to an Ethnicity & diversity strand.
What are the expected benefits of the policy, practice, process or procedure?	Feedback from customers providing an opportunity to improve our Service Offer.

Equality Action Plan

Please list any recommendations for action that are planned as a result of this impact assessment

(Categories: Age, Disability, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex (Gender), Sexual Orientation, Gender Reassignment, Marriage & Civil Partnership, Pregnancy & Maternity, Social Class/Background, Other)

Identify groups	Action required/changes and modifications to outline of the promotional benefits	By Whom	By When	Evaluation and Date
Disability	Ensure all staff are aware that a complaint does not have to be in writing	Tracy Espinosa	May 2012	
Disability	Include paragraph at beginning of procedure document and leaflet and on feedback form stating that procedures will be made available using a variety of mediums (hard copy, web pages, c space) and that they will be available on request on special colour paper, in any required font size and via special IT packages for partially sighted recipients, in Braille or in any preferred	Tracy Espinosa	May 2012	

	language (the above list should not be seen as exhaustive). Statement to include complainants preferred method of communication.			
Disability/Other	Write a simple 'Student guide to the Complaints Procedure'	Tracy Espinosa	June 2012	
Race/Religion/Beliefs	If complainant is uncomfortable discussing complaint with a particular members of staff they will be offered the opportunity to discuss with another member of staff. All staff to be made aware of this through training.	Disability	Include paragraph at beginning of procedure document and leaflet and on feedback form stating that procedures will be made available using a variety of mediums (hard copy, web pages, c space) and that they will be available on request on special colored paper, in any required font size and via special IT packages for partially sighted recipients, in Braille or in any	

			preferred language (the above list should not be seen as exhaustive). Statement to include complainants preferred method of communication.	
Age/Disability/Race/Gender	Continuously monitor all complaints and provide a summary of those identified under the category of Equality & Diversity to the Equality & Diversity Group for discussion along with information about any additional complaints that may relate to Equality & Diversity.	Tracy Espinosa	Ongoing	
Religion or Belief/Sexual Orientation/Gender Reassignment/Marriage & Civil/Partnership/Pregnancy/Maternity	This information is soon to be collected and recorded by the College. Database to be modified to ensure these Equality and Diversity strands are considered.	Tracy Espinosa	Ongoing	

If the action proposed will not fully eliminate negative impact, why is this and how can it be justified?	N/A
General comments/concerns	

- This document has been impact assessed against the Communication Guidelines and Equality Impact Assessment process

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Compliments and Complaints Procedure

Compliments

All compliments are logged by the College and fed back to the appropriate member of staff. We will respond to all compliments.

Informal Complaints

Most concerns can be resolved informally by discussing the issue with the person directly involved. Groups of learners may raise a concern about their course with their course student representative. If the issue cannot be informally resolved a formal complaint may be made. More serious concerns should be forwarded to the Quality Improvement Team where they will be logged and forwarded to the appropriate person for investigation.

Stage 1 – Formal

At Stage 1 the complaint will be investigated by the Head of Department/Team or a nominated Manager. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to their complaint they can progress to Stage 2 by contacting the Quality Improvement Team.

Stage 2 – Appeal

At Stage 2 the complaint will be investigated by the Quality Improvement Team and will be overseen by the Deputy Principal. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to their complaint they can progress to Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Independent Review

At Stage 3 the complaint will be reviewed by a panel comprising of a member of the Senior Leadership Team (the Chair) and two other College Managers. The complainant will be informed of the membership of the review panel and will receive a final response from the Chair of the review panel.

Complaints received by University of Essex students will be investigated by the College at Stage 1 and 2. At Stage 3 their complaint will be reviewed by the University of Essex.

Higher Education students studying University of East London programmes should refer to the University of East London Complaints Procedures.

Please refer to the full Compliments and Complaints Procedure for further information

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Introduction

South Essex College of Further & Higher Education is committed to providing high quality services for all our learners, employers and the community in general and we welcome their feedback. This procedure operates within the College's Equality & Diversity Policy and we welcome all types of feedback as this forms an important part of how we improve quality.

The College is pleased to receive compliments. It is always good to know that what we do is appreciated and to hear about positive experiences. This helps the College to know how well we perform, to feedback praise to our staff, and to continuously improve. You can pay the College a compliment by writing to the Quality Improvement Team at the College, emailing the Quality Improvement Team at qualityimprovement@southessex.ac.uk or by completing the attached feedback form (see Appendix 1) and returning to the address provided. Compliments can also be made by telephone (01702 220400) or in person.

From time to time an individual may feel dissatisfied with some aspect of his or her dealings with the College and when that happens it is important that the issue is dealt with as quickly as possible.

In this instance the issue can be raised as a complaint. Complaints could include:-

- an aspect of College policy;
- the provision and accessibility of a service;
- the way an individual has been treated;

A formal complaint can be made by writing to the Quality Improvement Team at the College, emailing the Quality Improvement Team at qualityimprovement@southessex.ac.uk or by completing the attached feedback form (see Appendix 1) and returning to the address provided. Complaints can also be made by telephone (01702 220400) or in person. For further information about making a complaint in person please contact 01702 220452.

This procedure has been developed to ensure that such complaints are dealt with in a timely way, appropriately and sensitively.

Is the Compliments and Complaints Procedure for me?

Compliments

We are committed to providing all our learners/employers/community with an outstanding service. When you feel that you have received a first class experience we would welcome you providing us with feedback on what we did well to meet your needs. Your feedback on what we do well means a lot to us.

We will use your feedback to:

- inform us on what aspects of our work are meeting our high quality standards

- enable us to feedback to our staff the appreciation of our learners/employers/ community
- give us valuable information on excellent practice which can be cascaded across the whole organisation
- inform us on ways that we might change our policies, procedures or practices to incorporate excellent practice

When we receive a compliment it will be logged by a member of staff. The contents of the compliment will be fed back to the appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team. The Deputy Principal will analyse all compliments and judge where they can be used to inform quality improvement in the College. A summary of all compliments will be provided to the Senior Leadership Team. We will respond to all compliments.

Complaints

However, we realise that sometimes things go wrong. If your complaint relates to any issues covered by the policies or procedures below, please refer to the relevant document instead of this procedure, to ensure your complaint is dealt with appropriately. Copies of these documents can be obtained from Reception, Student Services or the College Intranet.

- Academic Appeals Procedure for FE Students (for students studying a Further Education course who wish to appeal against a result or results)
- Academic Appeals Procedure for HE Students (for students studying a Higher Education course who wish to appeal against an Exam Board decision)
- Student Policy Against Harassment and Bullying (for students wanting to report harassment or bullying)
- Student Guide to the Disciplinary Procedures (for students who are subject to the College Disciplinary procedures)
- Staff Dignity at Work Procedure (for staff wanting to report harassment or bullying)
- Staff Grievance Policy (for staff wanting to resolve a grievance relating to their employment)

Anyone who wishes to complain but is uncertain of the appropriate procedure should seek advice from their Personal Tutor, Curriculum Manager, Deputy Head of Department/Head of Department/Head of Team, Student Services or the Quality Improvement Team. Staff should contact Human Resources.

If you have difficulty completing a feedback form a member of Student Services or the Quality Improvement Team can help.

Responses to complaints are normally in writing, although additional methods of response are available upon request.

Key Principles in successfully resolving complaints

Throughout this document an individual who has complained will be referred to as a complainant.

- The complainant should try to resolve the matter informally in the first instance. Dissatisfaction often arises from misunderstanding, which is why the best starting point is with the person whose actions are the cause of dissatisfaction or with the manager of the Department or team responsible for the provision of the service. If you explain to someone what the problem is they can often provide an immediate explanation or solution.
- Once it is clear to the complainant that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, a formal complaint should be made as soon as possible. It is much more likely that the matter will be satisfactorily resolved if it is raised at an early stage.
- Complaints will be dealt with as quickly as possible and complainants kept informed of progress if the investigation is prolonged.
- Staff are under an obligation not to allow a complaint to have any bearing on the way that a student is treated or assessed; information about a complainant will only be disclosed when appropriate and/or necessary to the investigating team.
- If a student who is subject to disciplinary procedures makes a complaint, which relates in any way to the allegation against him/her, then this matter would be taken into account as part of the Disciplinary Process, not as part of the Complaints Procedures.
- Complaints about a member of staff will be investigated by their Line Manager. The Line Manager will normally be expected to share the complaint with the individual concerned.
- If a Stage 2 or 3 investigation identifies concerns about staff performance/conduct, the Deputy Principal will notify the Head of Human Resources
- In exceptional circumstances, the Deputy Principal may decide to omit Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedures and proceed directly to Stage 2.
- The effectiveness of any complaints procedure depends on the College being able to collect appropriate information from the parties involved in order to investigate the matter properly. Therefore, only the Deputy Principal can decide whether to investigate an anonymous complaint.
- Information in relation to complaints will be stored and processed in line with Data Protection Act 1998.
- Complaints received by a Department/Team which relate to another Department/Team will be forwarded to the Quality Improvement Team for processing as appropriate.
- Complaints received from legal organisations may be referred to the College's solicitor for action and as such may fall outside of these procedures.
- Complaints that raise concerns about 'safeguarding' will be brought to the attention of the Safeguarding Team.

Informal Complaints

If you have a concern about an aspect of your course or any of the College's services, you should contact the staff member most directly involved, someone who you will know already. If you are not sure who to contact or you do not want to approach the person most directly involved, then you should contact your Personal Tutor, Course Team Leader or Curriculum Manager. If you are aware that other students share your concerns then you could make use of your course student representative.

Stage 1 - Formal

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally you may make a formal complaint. The complaint should be raised as soon as possible and normally no more than 6 months after the failure in the service or the matter giving rise to the complaint. This stage is designed to enable complaints to be resolved formally by the Department or Team responsible.

- **In the case of learners** they should raise their complaint/concern with their Head of Department/Team. The Head of Department/Team or nominated manager will then take into account all relevant facts, needs and interests of all concerned and use their discretion to resolve the matter with due sensitivity. They will normally provide feedback in writing to the complainant within 10 working days. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they should proceed to Stage 2.
- **In the case of a parent/carer** who is dissatisfied with any aspect of their daughter/son's course of study at the College, they should initially bring it to the attention of the Head of Department/Team. The Head of Department/Team or nominated manager will then take into account all relevant facts, needs and interests of all concerned and use their discretion to resolve the matter with due sensitivity. They will normally provide feedback in writing to the Complainant within 10 working days. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they should proceed to Stage 2.
- **In the case of an employer** who is dissatisfied with any aspect of their employee's course of study at the College, they should initially bring it to the attention of the Head of Department/Team. The Head of Department/Team or nominated manager will then take into account all relevant facts, needs and interests of all concerned and use their discretion to resolve the matter with due sensitivity. They will normally provide feedback in writing to the Complainant within 10 working days. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they should proceed to Stage 2.
- **In the case of a complaint made against an Head of Department/Team** their Line Manager will investigate and will normally provide feedback verbally or in writing to the Complainant within 10 working days. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they should proceed to Stage 2.
- **In the case of a member of the public** who is dissatisfied with any aspect of College business, they should initially bring it to the attention of the Quality Improvement Team who will pass the complaint to the appropriate Head of Department/Team. The Head of Department/Team or nominated manager will normally provide feedback in writing to the Complainant within 10 working days. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they should proceed to Stage 2. The Quality Improvement Team can be contacted by writing to the Quality Improvement Team at the College, emailing the Quality Improvement Team at qualityimprovement@southessex.ac.uk or by completing the attached feedback form (see Appendix 1) and returning it to the address provided.

Alternatively, the feedback form (see Appendix 1) can be completed and sent directly to the Quality Improvement Team who can forward this on to the appropriate Head of Department/Team. All complaints must first be investigated at Stage 1, unless agreed otherwise by the Deputy Principal.

Stage 2 – Appeal

This stage is designed to deal with any complaint an individual might have that cannot be resolved at Stage 1. An appeal should be lodged with the Quality Improvement Team within 20 working days of the unsatisfactory outcome of Stage 1. An extension of these time limits will only be possible in exceptional circumstances.

- Write to or telephone the Quality Improvement Team directly on 01702 220452.
- Detail what steps have been taken to resolve your complaint and explain why the outcome at Stage 1 is not considered satisfactory. This information will help us to investigate the complaint more effectively.
- The Quality Improvement Team will acknowledge all complaints/appeals within five working days of receipt.
- The Quality Improvement Team aim to investigate and respond to all complaints within 15 working days. Some complaints, especially if they are complex, may take longer. If it is going to take longer to investigate the complaint we will let you know and keep you informed of progress.
- Responses to complaints will normally be in writing.

Stage 3 – Independent Review

If you are unhappy with the response to your complaint at Stage 2 you can request that your complaint is reviewed by an independent panel.

- The request for review must be submitted in writing within 10 working days of the written response from the College, setting out clearly the basis of dissatisfaction with the findings of the formal investigation. This request should be addressed to the Deputy Principal, South Essex College of Further & Higher Education, FREEPOST SMU 110, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS2 5BR.
- The request for a review will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt.
- The review panel will comprise of a member of the Senior Leadership Team (Chair), or their nominee, a Head of Department/Team or their nominee (other than that to which your complaint refers) and another member of the College Management Team (who is not directly involved with your complaint). This will enable us to select a manager with relevant knowledge if appropriate. You will be informed of the membership of the review panel.
- The review may take up to 15 working days to complete.
- A final response will be sent in writing by the Chair of the review panel.

Higher Education

University of Essex programmes

Complaints received from students on University of Essex programmes will be investigated by the College at Stage 1 and 2. The Higher Education Management Team will be fully involved in this process. If a student remains dissatisfied they can request a further final review by the University of Essex.

Procedure for Stage 3

- The student should write to the Academic Registrar at University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ to request a review by the University, setting out clearly the basis of dissatisfaction with the findings of the formal investigation. The request for review must be submitted within 10 working days of the Stage 2 written response to the formal complaint.
- The Academic Registrar will acknowledge the request within five working days of receipt and will refer the case to the relevant Pro-Vice-Chancellor.
- If the Pro-Vice-Chancellor considers that the case for review is not well-founded then he or she will dismiss the case and will inform the complainant accordingly, normally within 10 working days.
- If the Pro-Vice-Chancellor considers that the case for review is well-founded then he or she will initiate an appropriate investigation and will let the complainant know, normally within 10 working days, when he or she can expect a response.
- The Pro-Vice-Chancellor will respond to the complainant in writing with details of the findings indicating, if the complaint is upheld, what the outcome will be. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor's decision will be final.
- The response to the complaint will be copied to the Academic Registrar who will maintain a central record of complaints and who will report termly to the Vice-Chancellor.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints or appeals. When the University's internal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals have been exhausted, the University will issue a Completion of Procedures letter. Students wishing to avail themselves of the opportunity for an independent review by the OIA must submit their application to the OIA within three months of the issue of the Completion of Procedures letter. Full details of the scheme are available on request and will be enclosed with the Completion of Procedures letter.

Quality Improvement

The College keeps a log of all compliments and complaints. Departments/Teams maintain a status log of all complaints received at Stage 1. All Stage 1 responses must be approved by the Head of Department/Team and copied to the Quality Improvement Team. The Quality Improvement Team are responsible for managing complaints at Stage 2 and 3. In order to secure ongoing improvement, the overall process is monitored for consistency, quality of response and compliance with procedure.

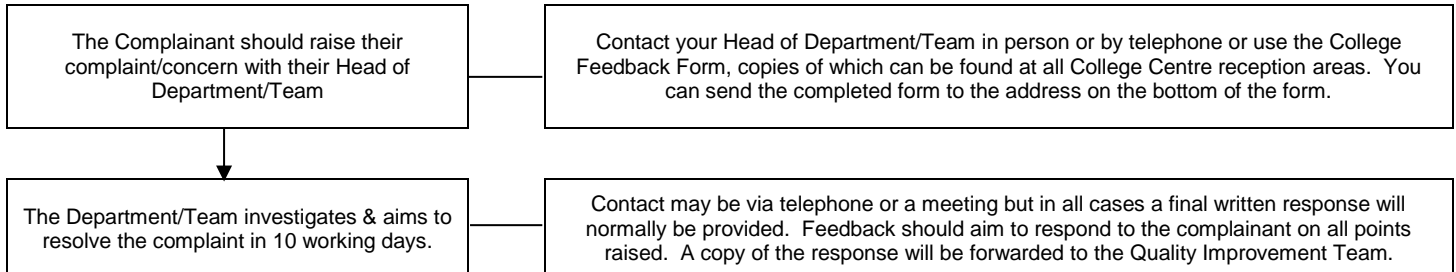
Heads of Department/Team are provided with feedback on progress in relation to complaints resolution and this is discussed in Self-Assessment meetings, and termly Curriculum Health Checks, a summary of compliments and complaints is reviewed by the College Curriculum & Quality Group and The Further Education Corporation (Curriculum & Quality) Group at the end of each Term.

The Further Education Corporation (governing body of South Essex College) reviews and discusses the Compliments and Complaints report with members of the Senior Leadership Team on at least an annual basis. A report on the outcome of all formal complaints received from University of Essex students will be provided to the University of Essex Curriculum & Quality Group.

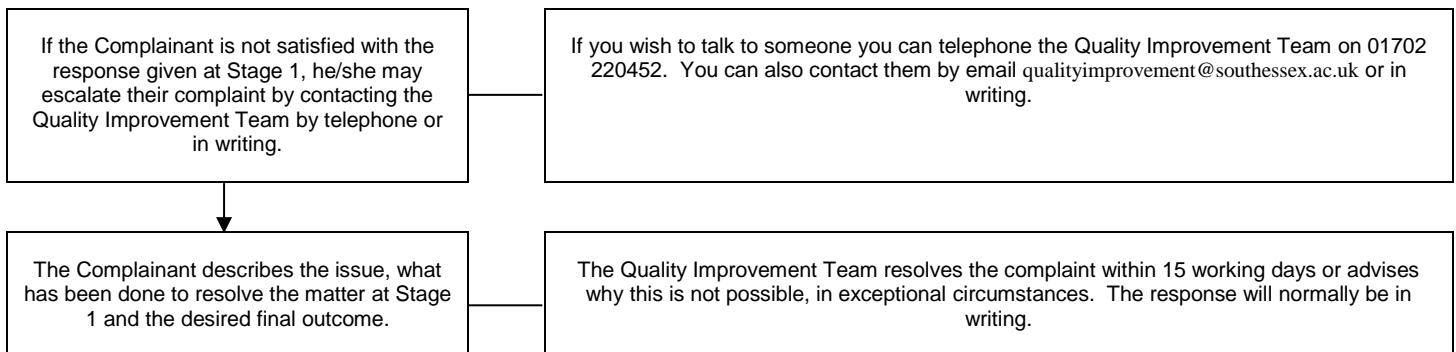
Complaints Procedure

The College is committed to providing high quality services for our learners, employers and the community in general; we welcome this feedback to help us to improve Quality. This procedure operates within the College's Equality and Diversity Policy and an appropriate person will deal with your complaint with due sensitivity as necessary. A person who complains is referred to as the Complainant throughout this document.

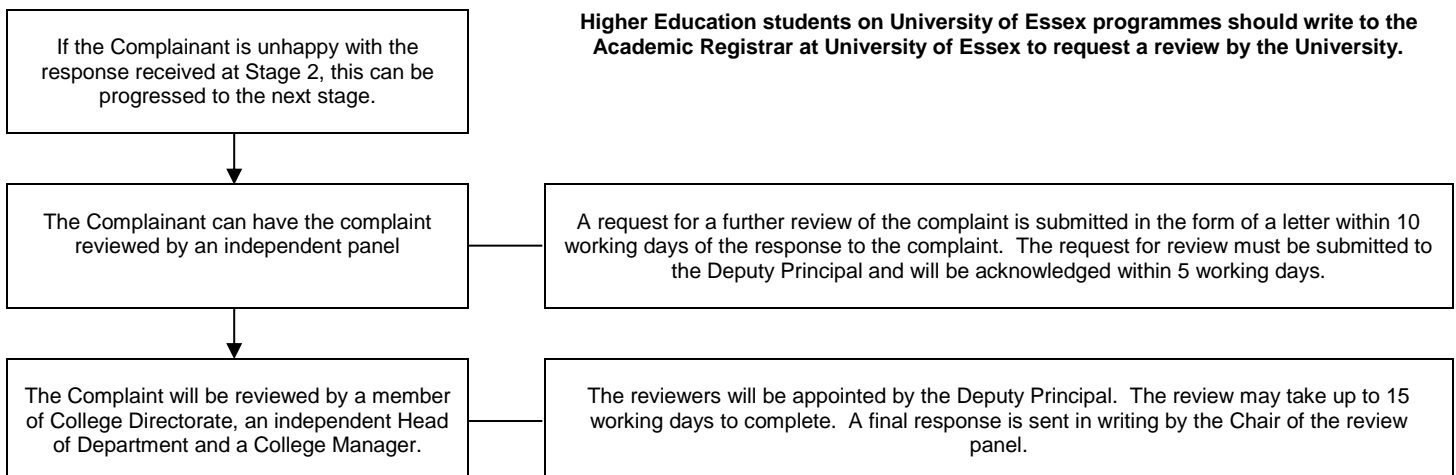
STAGE 1 - Formal (With Department/Team)



STAGE 2 - Appeal (With Quality Improvement Team)



STAGE 3 Independent Review



Quality Improvement: The College keeps a log of all compliments and complaints. Departments/Teams maintain a status log of all complaints received at Stage 1. All Stage 1 responses must be approved by the Head of Department/Team and copied to the Quality Improvement Team. The Quality Improvement Team are responsible for managing complaints at Stage 2 and 3. In order to secure ongoing improvement, the overall process is monitored for consistency, quality of response and compliance with procedure. Heads of Department/Team are provided with feedback on progress in relation to complaints resolution and this is discussed in Self-Assessment meetings, and termly Curriculum Health Checks, a summary of compliments and complaints is reviewed by the College Curriculum & Quality Group and The Further Education Corporation (Curriculum & Quality) Group at the end of each Term. The Further Education Corporation (governing body of South Essex College) reviews and discusses the Compliments and Complaints report with members of the Senior Leadership Team on at least an annual basis. A report on the outcome of all formal complaints received from University of Essex students will be provided to the University of Essex Curriculum & Quality Group on an annual basis.

Appendix 1 **College Feedback Form**



Compliment/Complaints (delete as appropriate)

The College is committed to providing high quality services for our learners, employers and the community in general. We welcome this feedback to help us to improve Quality. Please complete this form, including as much information as possible.

Please note that staff are under an obligation not to allow a complaint by a student to have any bearing on the way that the student is treated or assessed.

Name

Date

Address

Post Code

Tel. No.

Course

Please set out clearly the nature and origin of your compliment/complaint

Please continue overleaf if necessary

If a complaint, please describe the steps you have taken to resolve your complaint informally. If this has not been possible, or the outcome is not satisfactory, please explain why.

Please let us know what we can do to resolve this matter.

Please continue overleaf if necessary

Signature of person making compliment/complaint

College date stamp

Please return to the College reception or by post to:

*The Quality Improvement Team, South Essex College of Further & Higher Education,
FREEPOST SMU 110, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 5BR*

The information provided on this form will be stored and processed under the Data Protection Act 1998