New College Durham

Complaints

Policy & Procedure

Policy Title	**Complaints Policy & Procedure**
Document Owner	**Head of Student Conduct & Administrative Services**
Directorates and Departments affected by this Policy	**All Staff**
Policy Effective From	**July 2026**
Next Review Date	**July 2028**

New College Durham is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, as well as vulnerable adults, and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

If you require an alternative format please contact help@newdur.ac.uk or 0191 375 4040.

We review our policies regularly to ensure they remain up to date, accessible and fair to all. All policies are subject to equality impact assessments to determine whether they have, or are likely to have, a different impact on people with protected characteristics. We welcome suggestions that may improve the accessibility or fairness of this and other College policies. The College's Senior Leadership Team has overall responsibility for reviewing and approving this policy.

Other policies and procedures mentioned in this document will be published internally and externally in these locations:

Website
Staff Intranet
Student Intranet

[This policy has been assessed for its compliance with the principles of the OIA Good Practice Framework]

To make suggestions or to request further information please contact:

principalship.corporatehelpdesk@newdur.ac.uk

Contents

1. Scope 3
2. Responsibilities 3
3. Relationship with Existing Policies and Regulations 3
4. Categories of Complaint 4
5. Complaints Process and Timescales 5
6. Accessibility and Clarity 6
7. Fairness and Independence 6
8. Confidentiality 7
9. Proportionality 7
10. Impact on the Student Experience 7
11. Complaints about External Providers 7
12. Higher Education and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) 8
13. How to Submit a Complaint 9
13. Appendix 1 – Flow Chart 11

1. Scope

This policy and procedure explains what the College will consider as a complaint, the principles that apply when complaints are considered, who is responsible at each stage, the types of complaint covered, the stages and timescales of the process, and matters that must instead be considered under another College policy or procedure.

2. Responsibilities

The Senior Leadership Team is responsible for ensuring that the College maintains an effective complaints policy and procedure that complies with relevant legislation and the requirements of regulators, validating partners and accreditation bodies.

The Principal and Chief Executive is responsible for receiving requests for appeal at the final internal stage and appointing an impartial member of the Executive Leadership Team to conduct the appeal review.

The Head of Student Conduct & Administrative Services is responsible for oversight of all formal complaints, including monitoring and audit of the process, ensuring that appropriate investigations and responses are completed, and determining when the College's internal complaints procedure has been exhausted. The Head is accountable for ensuring the appropriate Completion of Procedures documentation is issued at the correct stage.

Heads of School, Heads of Department and Managers are responsible for considering complaints at the informal stage and seeking early resolution wherever possible.

The Head of Student Conduct & Administrative Services is responsible for the administration of Completion of Procedures documentation for eligible higher education complaints, under the oversight of Vice Principal for Higher Education, and for liaison with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), relevant College staff and external higher education partners where required.

Any complaints concerning assessment must be dealt with using the College's separate Academic Appeals Policy.

Any complaint relating to fitness to practise must be dealt with under the Fitness to Practise Policy and Procedure.

Any complaint in relation to a staff or student disciplinary matter will be dealt with under the relevant Disciplinary Policy.

3. Relationship with Existing Policies and Regulations

This policy will ensure clarity in relation to other College Policies:

- Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure- Academic Appeals Policy November 2025.pdf / Academic Appeals Procedure November 2025.pdf

- Freedom of Information Policy- Freedom of Information Policy.pdf
- Refund and Compensation Policy- Refund and Compensation Policy.pdf
- Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy- Public Interest Disclosure Procedure.pdf
- Fitness to Practise Policy and Procedure-Fitness to Practise Policy 2024 .pdf
- Student and Staff Disciplinary Policies- Disciplinary Procedure - Feb 2025.pdf / Disciplinary Procedure for Students Jan 2026.pdf
- Refund and Compensation Policy- Refund and Compensation Policy.pdf

4. Categories of Complaint

Type	Define	Can be from
Teaching and Learning	Complaint in relation to the structure or delivery of teaching	Student Parent/Carer if 18 or under
Assessment administration and delivery	Complaint about the administration, organisation or delivery of an assessment. Challenges to academic judgement, marks, grades or assessment decisions must be made under the Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure.	Student Parent/Carer if 18 or under
Accommodation and Resources	Complaint about the physical buildings or the resources provided	Student Public
Management and Administration	Complaint about procedural conduct and policy implementation (ie. whether a department has followed procedure)	Student Parent/Carer if 18 or under Public
Student Support and Services	Complaint about Tutorials, ASC, the Library, the Students' Union or any other non-teaching service provided to a student or applicant	Student Parent/Carer if 18 or under Public
Equality & Diversity Related	Complaint about the way the College has applied its equality, diversity and inclusion responsibilities, or about alleged discrimination, harassment or unequal treatment.	Student Public
Local Community	Complaint from the public about any aspect of the College, except disability related	Public
Freedom of Information review and	Request for an internal review of a response issued under the Freedom of Information process. Where a separate Freedom of Information review procedure applies, the complainant will be directed to that procedure.	Student Public Staff
Data Protection Subject Access Requests	Any additional requests submitted following the initial response to a subject access request will be captured within the scope of this procedure while following the Information Commissioner's Office guidance.	Student Public Staff

External Partner	Complaint from a student about provision delivered by, or on behalf of, an external partner with which the College has a contractual relationship. Complaints about the partner organisation more generally are outside the scope of this procedure.	Student

5. Complaints Process and Timescales

The College complaints process has three stages. The timescales below apply unless the complainant is advised that additional time is required. The College will explain the reason for any delay and provide a revised timescale. A complaint should normally be raised within 90 calendar days of the matter giving rise to the complaint.

a. Informal

The College aims to resolve concerns informally and as early as possible. A complaint received at this stage will normally be considered by the relevant manager in the area concerned. A proportionate investigation will be undertaken and a response will normally be provided within 14 calendar days of the College confirming receipt. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request escalation to the formal stage within 14 calendar days of receiving the informal response.

b. Formal

A formal complaint may be considered once the informal stage has been completed, or earlier where the Head of Student Conduct & Administrative Services considers that the nature or seriousness of the matter makes this appropriate. The Head of Student Conduct & Administrative Services will allocate the complaint to an appropriate investigating manager who is independent of the matter complained about. A formal response will normally be provided within 24 calendar days of receipt of the request to escalate.

c. Appeal / review

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the formal stage, the next step depends on the validating body.
For New College Durham validated higher education programmes, an appeal must be submitted in writing to the Principal and Chief Executive within 28 calendar days of receiving the formal response. The Principal and Chief Executive will appoint an impartial member of the Executive Leadership Team to review the complaint, and the College will normally issue the appeal outcome within 38 calendar days. Once this final internal stage is complete, an eligible student will receive a Completion of Procedures letter and may then refer the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

For Open University validated programmes, the College's internal process concludes after the formal stage. The College will issue a Completion of Internal Procedures (COIP) letter, after which the student has 21 calendar days to request a review by the Open University.

The Open University is responsible for its review, for issuing its Completion of Procedures letter, and for liaison with the OIA.

For all other complaints, including non-academic complaints and those relating to any other courses delivered by New College Durham, complainants have the right to submit a written appeal to the Principal and Chief Executive within **28 calendar days** of receiving the College's formal response. The Principal and Chief Executive will appoint an impartial member of the Executive Leadership Team to undertake a review of the complaint and the original decision. The College will normally provide a written appeal outcome within **28 calendar days** of receiving the appeal. The outcome of this review will be final and will mark the conclusion of New College Durham's internal complaints process.

The College aims to complete its internal complaints process within 90 calendar days. Where a complaint is subsequently referred to the Open University or the OIA, the relevant organisation's procedures and timescales will apply.

6. Accessibility and Clarity

The College will publish this policy and procedure in an accessible location and review it regularly. Information about how to raise a complaint, the stages of the process and the expected timescales will be presented as clearly as possible.

Students, applicants, employers, visitors and members of the public may raise a complaint where the matter falls within the scope of this policy. Employees raising concerns in their capacity as employees must use the relevant staff procedure.

A complainant may appoint a representative to support them during the complaints process. The representative must not act in a legal capacity within the College's internal procedure.

The College will make reasonable adjustments to the complaints process where required to meet a complainant's accessibility needs.

Records of complaints will be maintained by the Administration Manager and standard documentation will be used.

7. Fairness and Independence

The College is committed to ensuring the process for investigating complaints is fair.

Staff involved in the investigation of complaints will be appropriately trained and should not have a direct connection to the complainant or the business area or School about which the complaint has been made. There should be no bias in the investigation process, perceived or actual.

Students will not be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint.

Anonymised statements are not accepted as part of the investigation process.

The response to a complaint will give clear reasons for the outcome.

If a complainant raises genuinely new and separate concerns after a response has been issued, the College will decide whether those concerns should be considered as a new complaint from the informal stage or whether they can appropriately be considered within the existing process. The complainant will be informed of the route that will apply.

8. Confidentiality

Complaints will be handled confidentially and information will be shared only with those who need it for the purpose of considering, investigating or responding to the complaint. Making a complaint will not in itself disadvantage a student or adversely affect their educational experience.

Information provided during an investigation may need to be shared with other parties where this is necessary to conduct a fair investigation. Individuals providing evidence should therefore be made aware that their statement, and where necessary their identity, may be disclosed.

9. Proportionality

Where a matter engages more than one College policy or procedure, the Administration Manager will determine, in consultation with the relevant leads, how the processes should be coordinated. The complainant will be told which procedure or procedures will apply and how the matter will be managed.

The College expects all parties to behave reasonably and fairly towards each other and to treat the process with respect.

The College will minimise unnecessary repetition of information. Where information already held by the College is relevant to a complaint or appeal, it should be made available to the investigator only where this is appropriate, necessary and permitted under the College's information governance requirements.

10. Impact on the Student Experience

Complaints provide an indicator of the student experience. We use the information gathered from our complaints to improve the student experience and service provided to our students.

11. Complaints about External Providers

Where a complaint concerns provision delivered by an external partner, the complainant will normally be expected to use the partner's complaints procedure first. If a complaint about an external partner is received by the College before that process has been completed, the College may refer the matter to the partner and explain this to the complainant.

Once the partner's complaints procedure has been exhausted, an eligible student may ask the College's Head of Student Conduct & Administrative Services to review the matter where the College retains responsibility for the provision or award.

Any subsequent College consideration will follow the relevant stages and timescales set out in section 5, taking account of the stages already completed by the partner.

The College will seek to ensure that the overall process is completed as promptly as possible and, where the OIA Good Practice Framework applies, within the relevant overall timeframe unless there is good reason for an extension.

Where the complaint is eligible for referral to the OIA, the student will be issued with the appropriate Completion of Procedures documentation once the relevant internal procedures have been exhausted. The student may then decide whether to refer the matter to the OIA.

12. Higher Education and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

For eligible higher education complaints, the Head of Student Conduct & Administrative Services will request that Academic Registry collates the records and evidence held within the complaints workflow where these are required for Completion of Procedures administration or external review.

For students on New College Durham validated higher education programmes, a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued after the College's final internal appeal stage has been exhausted.

Good Practice Framework - OIAHEWhere a student refers an eligible complaint to the OIA, the College will cooperate with the OIA process and respond within any timescales specified by the OIA.

For students on Open University validated programmes, a Completion of Internal Procedures (COIP) letter will be issued after the College's internal formal stage has been exhausted.

The student may then request a review by the Open University within 21 calendar days of receiving the COIP letter. The Open University will conduct its review and, when its procedures are complete, will issue the relevant Completion of Procedures letter. A student cannot refer the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) until the Open University's review procedure has been completed.

13. How to Submit a Complaint

New College Durham is committed to providing quality services covering all aspects of its work. If occasionally such services do not meet the standards expected and this causes undue difficulties for students, employers or members of the local community, then this complaint procedure should be invoked.

If you wish to make a complaint what should you do first?

Student of the College:

a. If you have a complaint concerning your course you must first try to resolve your concern by talking to any of your tutors. If this does not resolve the concern you should then approach your Head of School. If you still remain unsatisfied by the response then you can submit a

formal complaint within 14 calendar days of receiving the feedback from the Head of School. Contact details can be found at intra.newdur.ac.uk.

b. Please note any complaints concerning assessment must be dealt with using the College's separate Academic Appeals Procedure, details of which are given in the Student Handbook and Diary. **(Please do not use the complaints form to register a complaint against any aspect of assessment and instead follow the Academic Appeals policy).**

c. If you have a complaint concerning any of the College Services you should in the first instance try to resolve the problem by talking to your subject tutor(s), personal tutor or course/programme leader. If this does not resolve the problem you can submit a formal complaint within 14 calendar days of receiving your informal response from the relevant area by using the same form intra.newdur.ac.uk

Employer, Visitor or Member of the Local Community:

Please do not hesitate to speak to staff at the Reception and Information Desk who will provide the name and telephone number of the relevant Manager. We would encourage all concerned to speak to a Manager first before submitting a formal complaint.

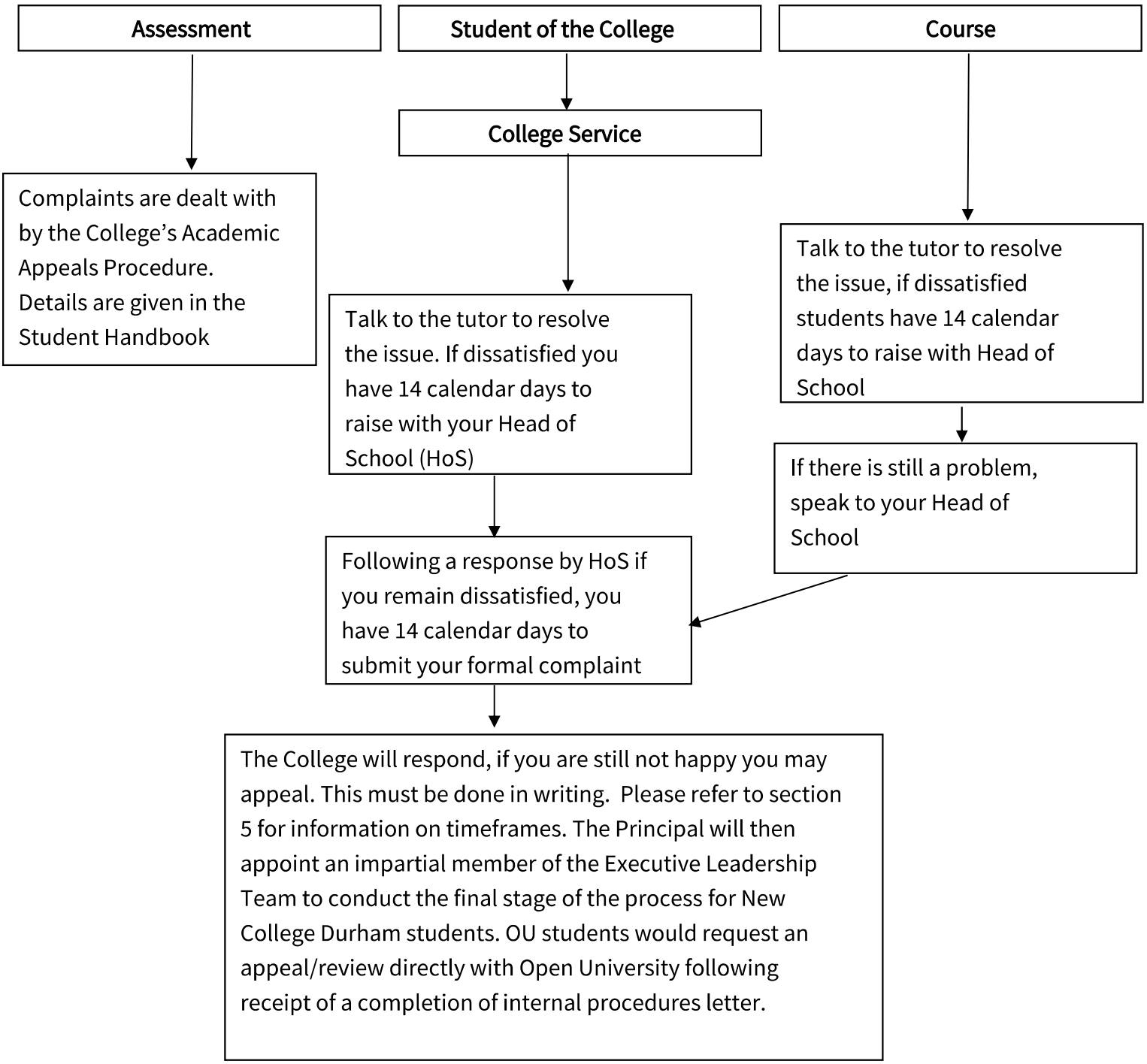
Other than for Data Protection Subject Access requests and Freedom of Information requests, this complaint procedure must not be utilised by employees of New College Durham for which there is a separate procedure for staff to raise concerns.

If you wish to make a complaint

Please complete the online form intra.newdur.ac.uk or email your complaint to help@newdur.ac.uk. Once your complaint has been received you will receive an email acknowledging receipt, within five working days.

Appendix 1: Procedure for Complaints - A guide for Students, Employers and other Members of the Local Community

- Speak to staff at the Reception and Information Desk who will provide the name and telephone number of the relevant Manager.
- If there is still a problem submit a formal complaint.
- The College will respond, if you are still not happy you may appeal. This must be done in writing to the Principal within 28 calendar days.



Equality Impact Assessment Record

New College Durham actively promotes the basic British values of democracy, the rules of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs.

1. **Department/School: Principalship & Corporate Services**
2. **People carrying out the assessment:** Diane Watson
3. **Policy/procedure being assessed:** Complaint Policy & Procedure
4. **Main aims of the policy/procedure:** To provide clear guidance and processes to students, parents, carers and the community on how they can raise concerns they may have.
5. **What examples of current good practice are there relating to the protected characteristics?** The Complaints Policy and Procedure promotes equality by providing a fair, accessible and consistent process for all individuals, regardless of protected characteristic. Reasonable adjustments and additional support can be provided where required to ensure individuals are able to access and engage with the complaints process.
6. **For which of the protected characteristics and/or the socio-economic factor could there be a negative impact?** *(Please tick ✓)* Age ☐ Disability ☐ Gender Re-assignment ☐ Marriage and Civil Partnership ☐ Pregnancy and Maternity ☐ Race ☐ Religion or Belief ☐ Sex ☐ Sexual Orientation ☐ Socio-Economic ☐
7. **Describe that impact** NA
8. **Is there any requirement to take action to mitigate this impact?** **If yes, please give details of the action and person/people responsible for the action(s).** NA

Completed by: *D Watson*	**Approved: SLT**

Printed Name: D Watson	
Role: Head of Student Conduct & Administrative Services	
Date: September 2026	