

TITLE: Customer Comments, Suggestions and Complaints Policy and Procedure (INTERNAL)	REF: CP001	VERSION: 7.3
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LEAD PERSON: Group Director of Student Services		
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VERSION	REVIEWER/APPROVAL	REVIEW NOTES
3. 24/03/2015	Governance/Quality Group	Full Review
4. 22/09/2015	Governance	Detail added to scope section
5. 26/10/2016	Group Executive Team	Changes to the procedure following restructure to faculties
6. 17/05/2017	Group Director of Marketing, Customers and Markets	Updated policy to clarify data protection requirements
7.1. 5/02/2018	Group Executive Team	Addition of more information about escalation of complaints to ESFA
7.2. 22/06/2018	Group Director of Marketing and Customer Experience / Corporation	
7.3 24/10/2019	Group Director of Student Services	General revisions

## CUSTOMER COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

### Policy Statement

Activate Learning aims to become renowned for achieving a high level of customer satisfaction and is committed to continually innovating and improving services for all its customers.

Activate Learning recognises the value of customer feedback and seeks out comments and suggestions that give insight into the customer experience and so inform service design and assist in achieving its goal of continuous improvement.

Where a customer feels that the service does not meet their expectations, there are customer-friendly processes for making a complaint. In recognising the potential to turn complainants into advocates, Activate Learning places great importance on complaint resolution. All employees are encouraged to take responsibility for resolving all informal complaints immediately to the satisfaction of the complainant. Where a complaint becomes formal, this will be resolved efficiently and within the specified time scales. Should a complainant not be satisfied with the resolution proposed, s/he has a right to appeal.

### Purpose

To provide a clear and consistent framework for dealing with comments, suggestions and complaints so that they can be monitored and reviewed to ensure continuous improvement.

## **Scope**

This policy covers all comments, suggestions and complaints by all Activate Learning customers, this includes learners on college-based further and higher education programmes as well as degree-level apprenticeships and Activate Business School or Activate Apprenticeships.

## **Definitions**

A comment/suggestion is an idea relating to a possible improvement in the customer experience.

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about action, or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by, or on our behalf.

## **Responsibilities**

All staff are responsible for ensuring that they are aware of and follow all relevant policies and procedures.

Managers and directors are responsible for investigating and resolving complaints according to the timescales set out the complaints procedure.

The Activate Learning group is responsible for the central overview of complaints and for monitoring compliance with standards. This is administered by the Group Administration service, under leadership of the Group Administration Managers.

The Group Director of Student Services has group overview of comments, suggestions and complaints, monitors these for emerging themes and learning points and reports to the Group Executive Team on key trends.

# **COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

## **1.0 Purpose**

1.1 To capture comments, suggestions and complaints in a consistent format to ensure that complaints are resolved quickly and satisfactorily and to enable the group to monitor customer satisfaction and make continuous improvements.

## **2.0 Complaints Process**

### **Informal Customer Complaints**

2.1 Most complaints can be resolved informally by discussing the issue with the person directly involved and taking immediate action to rectify any problem. If the complaint cannot be resolved at this stage, it will need to be progressed to the formal stage.

2.2 All informal complaints, along with details of the resolution, are passed to the Group Administration service via our [online form](http://www.ActivateLearning.ac.uk/feedback) found at [www.ActivateLearning.ac.uk/feedback](http://www.ActivateLearning.ac.uk/feedback) or via email at [feedback@activatelearning.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@activatelearning.ac.uk) for logging on the Complaint Tracker in order to extract learning points.

## **Formal Customer Complaints**

- 2.3 If informal discussions do not resolve the problem, or if the complaint is raised via our online form found at [www.ActivateLearning.ac.uk/feedback](http://www.ActivateLearning.ac.uk/feedback) or in writing clearly stating that the complainant wants the situation to be treated as a complaint, the complaint is deemed to be formal. It is logged on a Complaint Tracker by the Group Administration Managers and acknowledged within five working days of receipt.
- 2.4 If the formal complaint is received by a member of staff, s/he will pass the complaint to the Group Administration service via [feedback@activatelearning.ac.uk](mailto:feedback@activatelearning.ac.uk) to ensure that it is logged and responded to within the five working day service standard.
- 2.5 In formulating the complaint, the complainant can be helped and accompanied by another student of Activate Learning, a member of the Students' Union or a member of staff.
- 2.6 In accordance with Data Protection guidelines Activate Learning will obtain express consent when investigating an issue raised by a third party on behalf of another person affected by an issue. A Learner Information Sharing Consent form is used to obtain this consent. Should we not receive this consent within five working days we will consider the matter closed. Where a parent or carer of a student under 18 raises a complaint on behalf of that student, consent is assumed.
- 2.7 Activate Learning will investigate complaints notified within three months of the incident giving rise to the complaint.
- 2.8 The Group Administration Managers ensure that the complaint is passed to the relevant Director for them to or nominate a manager to investigate.
- 2.9 Following the conclusion of the investigation, the investigating manager sends a Completion of Procedure letter within 10 working days of the acknowledgement which will include the outcome of the investigation.
- 2.10 If the investigating manager is unlikely to resolve the complaint within 10 working days of the acknowledgement, the complainant will be informed of progress together with expected timescales for resolution.
- 2.11 If the complaint is against the corporation, a board member or the clerk to the corporation, the Procedure for Complaints against the Corporation, Board Members and the Clerk will be followed.
- 2.12 A complaint regarding the response to a Freedom of Information request is dealt with by the Clerk to the Corporation under the Procedure for Complaints against the Corporation, Board Members and the Clerk.

## **3.0 Appeals**

- 3.1 If the complainant is not satisfied with the response from the manager investigating the complaint, the complainant can appeal. The appeal is escalated to the relevant

member of the Group Executive Team who assigns a director not associated with the case to carry out an independent investigation to review and seek a resolution.

An appeal will only be considered on the following grounds:

- The investigation did not address all the complaint points raised
- New evidence has been made available that was not available at the time the complaint was submitted
- The investigation was not conducted in accordance with the procedures set out in the procedure for dealing with a complaint

If the appeal is outside the time limit or is not on the basis of one or more of the grounds stated above, it may not be considered. The appellant will be contacted within five working days to advise if their appeal has been accepted and is being investigated or if it has been rejected.

3.2 Appeals must be made within 10 days of the response to the complaint.

3.3 The appeal will be acknowledged within five working days.

3.4 The Appeal investigator will conduct a review of the original investigation and will consider the procedure undertaken, the integrity, any additional evidence and the outcome provided.

The findings of the review will be communicated within 15 working days. If the review is complex and likely to exceed this timescale, the complainant will be kept informed of progress. The possible outcomes are that the appeal will either be upheld, partially upheld or rejected.

3.5 Following the conclusion of the appeals process, complainants will be issued a Completion of Procedure letter.

3.6 If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal, the final recourse is to appeal to the Group Chief Executive within 10 days of the response to the complaint.

An appeal will only be considered on the following grounds:

- The investigation did not address all of the complaint points raised
- New evidence has been made available that was not available at the time the complaint was submitted
- The investigation was not conducted in accordance with the procedures set out in the procedure for dealing with a complaint

If the appeal is outside the time limit or is not on the basis of one or more of the grounds stated above, it may not be considered. The appellant will be contacted within five working days to advise if their appeal has been accepted and is being investigated or if it has been rejected.

- 3.7 If the complainant is not satisfied with how their complaint is handled, they can complain to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The contact must be within three months of the decision. [Complaints.ESFA@education.gov.uk](mailto:Complaints.ESFA@education.gov.uk)

ESFA will acknowledge the complaint within five days.

#### 4.0 Comments and Suggestions

- 4.1 All comments and suggestions are logged centrally by the Group Administration service, along with the actions that have resulted from the comment or suggestion.

#### 5.0 Monitoring for Continuous Improvement

- 5.1 Activate Learning keeps one central log of all comments and suggestions and one central Complaints Tracker.
- 5.2 In order that we can ensure continuous improvement, the process and procedure is monitored for consistency, quality of response and compliance and any potential emerging themes. The Group Executive Team reviews and discusses suggestions and complaints together with the Corporation on an annual basis.
- 5.3 Reports on the outcomes of formal complaints along with the emerging themes are produced by the Director of Student Services and are made available to managers providing a valuable input into the self-assessment and quality improvement process.

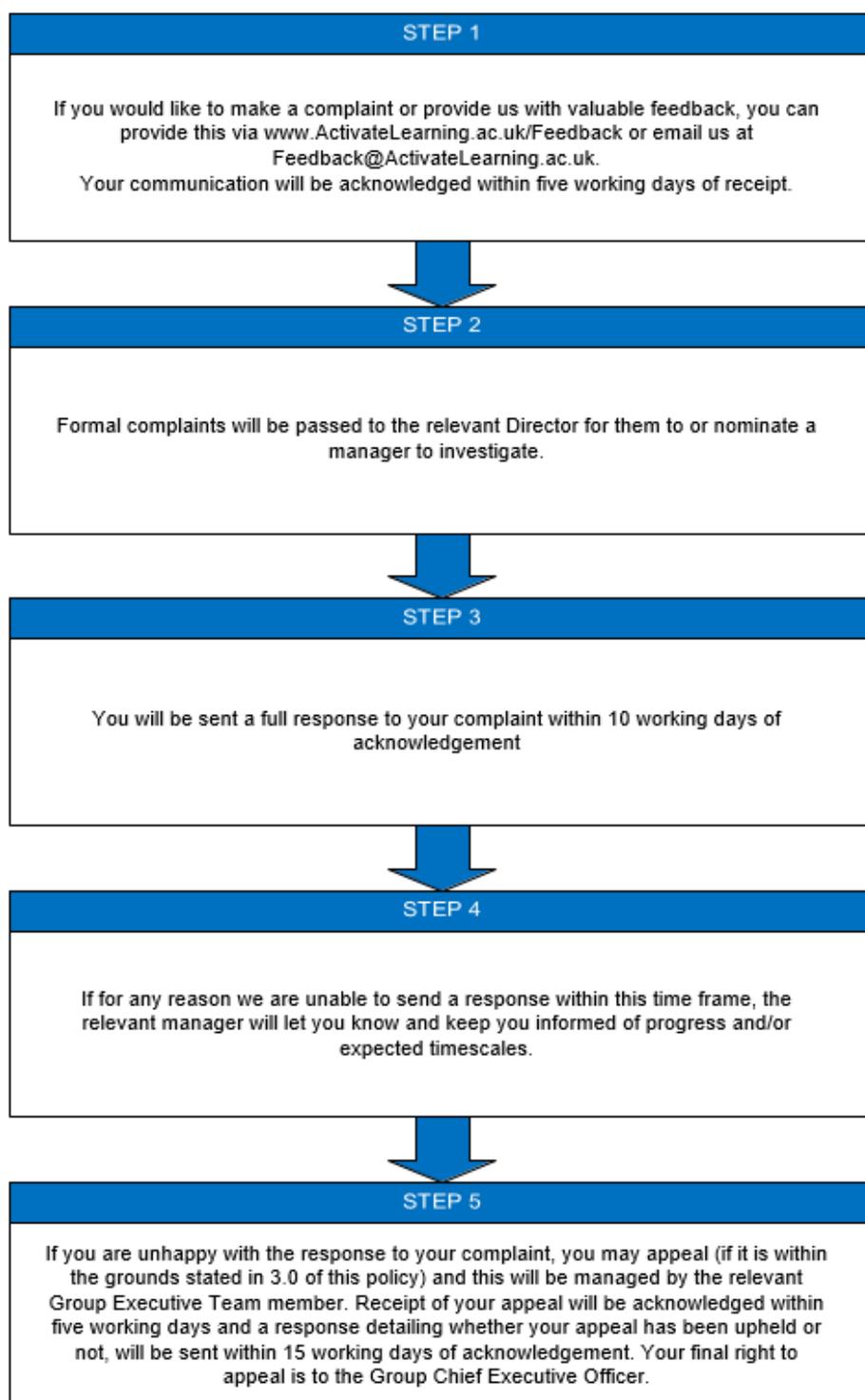
#### 6.0 Independent Review

- 6.1 In those rare cases where the internal complaints procedure has not resolved the matter, and depending on its nature, the following external organisations may review unresolved issues:

Contact	Area	Contact Details
Ofsted Complaints	Nurseries Only	<a href="mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk">enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk</a>
University partners	University awarding bodies provide an opportunity for students to avail themselves of the university complaints procedure.	
Office of the independent adjudicator (OIA – Higher Education)	The OIA for Higher Education provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints or appeals. Students wishing to avail themselves of the opportunity for an independent review by the OIA must submit their application within 3 months of the issue of the Completion of Procedures letter.	<a href="http://www.oia.org.uk">www.oia.org.uk</a>

Education Funding Agency	Students up to the age of 18 years	<a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>
Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)	The ESFA can investigate complaints about quality or management of learning provision, undue delay or non-compliance with published procedures, poor administration by the Provider, equality and diversity issues (except where there is a more appropriate mechanism for dealing with the matter through the court or tribunal or other organisations), health and safety concerns and complaints made by learners following HE courses in FE colleges.	<a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a> complaints.ESFA@education.gov.uk
National Apprenticeship Agency	Students on traineeships and apprenticeships	<a href="http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk">www.apprenticeships.org.uk</a>
National Union of Students	Students recognised union representation	<a href="http://www.nus.org.uk">www.nus.org.uk</a>
Information Commissioners Office (ICO)	The ICO can investigate the results of your internal appeal regarding Freedom of Information requests.	<a href="https://ico.org.uk">https://ico.org.uk</a> Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF Tel: 0303 123 1113 (local rate) or 01625 545 745 (National rate number)

## Appendix 1 - COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS STEP BY STEP GUIDE



## Appendix 2

### COMPLAINTS ADMINISTRATION OFFICE CONTACTS

Location/Contact	Telephone	Email	Address
Activate Apprenticeships / Activate Business School	01865 550550 opt. 3	<a href="mailto:hello@activateapprenticeships.co.uk">hello@activateapprenticeships.co.uk</a>	Activate Apprenticeships Technology Campus Cuddesdon Way Oxford OX4 6HN
Activate Learning	0800 612 6008	<a href="mailto:Feedback@ActivateLearning.ac.uk">Feedback@ActivateLearning.ac.uk</a>	Group Administration Office Activate Learning, City of Oxford College, Oxpens Road Oxford OX1 1SA
Higher Education	0800 612 6008	<a href="mailto:Feedback@ActivateLearning.ac.uk">Feedback@ActivateLearning.ac.uk</a>	Group Administration Office Activate Learning, City of Oxford College, Oxpens Road Oxford OX1 1SA
Clerk to the Corporation	0800 612 6008	<a href="mailto:Clerk@ActivateLearning.ac.uk">Clerk@ActivateLearning.ac.uk</a>	Clerk to the Corporation Activate Learning, City of Oxford College, Oxpens Road Oxford OX1 1SA