



Complaints Procedure

Introduction

Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College (HLNSC) welcomes feedback and regards complaints as an opportunity to improve services. The College will seek to resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity and learn from complaint outcomes to improve future practice.

This procedure applies to complaints received from students or external individuals, groups or organisation. Complaints should normally be submitted within three months of the incident or matter giving rise to the complaint. Complaints submitted outside this period may be considered where there are exceptional circumstances.

Complaint records will be retained for three academic years. Complaint themes and outcomes will be reviewed annually by the Deputy Principal and reported to Governors to support continuous improvement.

The College reserves the right not to consider complaints where there is reasonable evidence that the submission has been wholly generated by artificial intelligence and does not appear to represent the complainant's genuine concerns, experiences, or circumstances.

This procedure does not cover:

- Academic appeals
- Assessment decisions
- Examination results
- Student disciplinary matters
- Safeguarding concerns
- Whistleblowing disclosures
- Data protection requests
- Freedom of Information requests
- Employment matters
- Staff Grievance
- Complaints Against the Corporation.

Managing Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour

HLNSC is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly, respectfully and within reasonable timescales. Complainants can expect to be treated with courtesy and kept informed of progress, and in return the College expects all communications to be conducted in a respectful and reasonable manner.

Where a complainant's behaviour is considered persistent, unreasonable, abusive, harassing, excessive or vexatious, for example through repetitive correspondence, unreasonable demands, aggressive behaviour, or repeatedly pursuing matters that have already been fully investigated and concluded, the College reserves the right to take proportionate action. This may include restricting communication to a single point of contact, requiring correspondence



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to be made in writing, conducting meetings with more than one member of staff present, or, in exceptional circumstances, limiting contact with the College. Any such action will be reasonable, proportionate, and communicated in writing. The College will continue to consider any new, relevant complaints on their merits.

Informal Stage

If you have a complaint to make about our service, you should in the first instance, approach your course tutor or a member of the teaching team/department manager and see if it can be resolved.

Stage 1

If you have a complaint to make about any aspect of the College's service and it cannot be resolved informally or you remain dissatisfied, you should put the nature of your complaint in writing, submitted via the following channels:

- by email or post to the Manager responsible for the area, or
- by email to quality@hlnc.ac.uk.

The College recognises that some complainants may require support in making a complaint due to disability, learning difficulty, language needs, or other circumstances. Reasonable adjustments will be provided where required.

In the correspondence, the complainant should clearly identify the nature of their complaint, when and where the incident occurred and what has been done to attempt to resolve the complaint informally with the staff member. We aim to send an acknowledgement of your complaint within five working days.

Where a complaint is submitted by a third party on behalf of a student aged 18 or over, written consent from the student will normally be required.

We aim to provide the complainant with a formal response within ten working days. If we are unable to do this, the complainant will be kept informed of our progress. Every attempt will be made to resolve the complaint at Stage 1 before proceeding to Stage 2. The range of outcomes may include an apology, explanation, service improvement, staff training, review of procedures or no further action. The complaints process is not designed to reconsider academic judgement or impose disciplinary sanctions on individual members of staff.

Stage 2

If after Stage 1 you remain dissatisfied then you should put the reasons for your dissatisfaction in writing, submitted via the following channels within ten days of receiving the stage 1 outcome:

- by email or post to the relevant Vice Principal or Head of Department, or
- by email to quality@hlnc.ac.uk.

In the correspondence, the complainant should clearly identify the nature of their complaint and explain why the outcome of the Stage 1 process is not satisfactory. We aim to send an



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acknowledgement of your complaint within five working days and confirm the investigating officer.

Following acknowledgement of the complaint we will investigate, and you will receive a written response. As part of a Stage 2 complaint, HLNSC may make a request for additional information. If this is the case, then HLNSC would expect to receive the requested information from the complainant within five working days from the date of our request.

If we should find that your complaint is well founded, we will explain the action which we are taking. If we should find that your complaint is not justified, we will give you the reasons. We aim to provide the complainant with a formal response within ten working days. If we are unable to do this, the complainant will be kept informed of our progress.

Stage 3

If, following the Stage 2 outcome, the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may request a Stage 3 Complaint Review, which is the final stage of the College's complaints procedure. A request for a Stage 3 review must be submitted in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The purpose of the Stage 3 Complaint Review is not normally to reinvestigate the complaint, but to consider whether the Stage 2 investigation was conducted fairly, thoroughly and in accordance with the College's complaints procedure, and whether the outcome reached was reasonable based on the available evidence. The complainant should therefore explain why they believe the process was not followed correctly and/or why they consider the outcome to be unreasonable.

Correspondence for Stage 3 should be addressed to the Principal, Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College, Folly Lane, Hereford, HR1 1LS, or by email to s.tomkins@hlnc.ac.uk. We aim to acknowledge receipt of the request within five working days and confirm the Review Officer.

The stage 3 review will be conducted by the principal or nominated independent senior manager not previously involved. We aim to provide a written outcome of the review within twenty working days.

Where a request for a Stage 3 Complaint Review is received outside the timescale specified above, the complainant must provide a compelling reason, supported by appropriate evidence, demonstrating why they were unable to submit their request within the required timeframe. Late requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and acceptance will be at the discretion of the principal. The complainant will be informed if their late request is accepted within five working days.

This ends the HLNSC Complaints procedure.

On exhaustion of the College's complaints procedure, and where the complainant feels the outcome of the College's complaint investigation is deemed unsatisfactory, the matter can be raised with the awarding body, or the Department of Education if it is within the scope of their complaints policy.

**Additional entitlement for Pearson HN Students**

Students enrolled on Pearson Higher National (HN) programmes may have the right to request an independent review of their complaint by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) once the College's internal complaints procedure has been completed.

Students studying on a Pearson Higher National programme at Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College may be entitled to receive a Completion of Procedures Letter following the conclusion of the College's complaints or appeals process.

Where a complaint or appeal is not upheld at Stage 3, a Completion of Procedures Letter will be issued automatically following the final Stage 3 review.

Where a complaint or appeal is upheld or partly upheld following Stage 3, a Completion of Procedures Letter will not be issued automatically. However, the student may request one if they wish to refer the matter to the OIA. Requests must be made within one month of the date of the Stage 3 outcome letter.

The Completion of Procedures Letter confirms that the College's internal procedures have been completed and explains the student's right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for independent review. The OIA will determine whether the complaint falls within its remit and can be considered.