



Rotherham Opportunities College

Complaints, Concerns and Compliments Policy and Procedure



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1	June 2023	Principal	New Complaints Policy
2	June 2024	Principal	Review and updates
3	May 2025	Principal	Review and updates
4	May 2026	Principal	Review and updates
5	September 2026	Principal	Complaints and Compliments policies merged; concerns, accessibility, escalation, governance and learning arrangements updated



1. Purpose

Rotherham Opportunities College (ROC) welcomes feedback and is committed to responding to concerns and complaints openly, fairly and proportionately. Complaints, concerns and compliments all provide useful information about the experience of students, families, professionals and others who engage with the college. When considered together, they help ROC recognise good practice, resolve problems at an early stage and identify where services, communication or systems can be improved.

This policy brings ROC's previous Complaints Policy and Procedure and Compliments Policy into one framework. It explains how feedback can be raised, how concerns and complaints will be handled and reviewed, how compliments will be recognised and recorded, and how learning will be used to improve the quality of provision and student experience.

ROC will make the process accessible to students with SEND and to any person who requires communication support, advocacy or reasonable adjustments. The aim is to resolve matters as close to the point of concern as possible while ensuring that serious matters receive appropriate independent scrutiny.

2. Scope

This policy may be used by students, parents and carers, advocates, visitors, contractors, consultants, partner agencies, local residents, commissioners, professionals and members of the public. Staff may also use the policy when providing feedback or raising a concern about a college service in a non-employment capacity.

Employment matters raised by employees about their own employment, treatment at work or contractual arrangements will normally be considered under the relevant HR procedure, for example the Grievance, Dignity at Work, Whistleblowing or Disciplinary Policy. ROC will direct a matter to the most appropriate procedure and will explain this to the person raising it.

This policy may cover educational provision, support services, communication, administration, facilities, accessibility, student experience, conduct, equality, service standards and other aspects of ROC activity. It does not replace safeguarding, whistleblowing, data-protection, disciplinary, grievance, examination appeals or criminal procedures where those are the appropriate route.

3. Definitions

A concern is an expression of worry, dissatisfaction or unease that may be capable of being resolved quickly without a formal investigation.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about ROC, its services, decisions, actions, omissions or conduct where the person raising the matter wishes ROC to respond or take action.

A compliment is an expression of praise, satisfaction or appreciation about a student, member of staff, team, service, activity or the college as a whole.

Feedback is the broader term used in this policy to include concerns, complaints, compliments, comments and suggestions.



4. Principles

ROC will handle feedback in a way that is proportionate to the issue and consistent with its values. In particular, ROC will:

- respond respectfully, objectively and without defensiveness;
- seek early resolution where this is appropriate and safe;
- investigate formal complaints impartially and ensure that decision-makers have no material conflict of interest;
- protect individuals from victimisation for raising a concern or complaint in good faith;
- maintain confidentiality as far as reasonably possible, while sharing information where this is necessary to investigate, safeguard or meet legal duties;
- make reasonable adjustments and provide accessible communication for people who need support;
- focus on resolution, learning and improvement as well as determining what happened;
- keep appropriate records and use themes from feedback to inform quality improvement and governance oversight.

5. Accessibility, Advocacy and Support

ROC recognises that some students may find it difficult to identify, explain or pursue a concern because of communication needs, disability, anxiety, previous experiences or reliance on others for support. A student may raise a concern with any trusted member of staff and may be supported by a parent, carer, advocate, friend, professional or other appropriate person.

Reasonable adjustments may include Easy Read information, visual or symbol-supported communication, additional time, an interpreter, communication aids, advocacy, a trusted supporter, alternative meeting arrangements or receiving a complaint verbally rather than in writing. ROC will not insist on written communication where doing so would create an unnecessary barrier.

6. Safeguarding, Serious Misconduct and Other Procedures

If a concern or complaint indicates that a child, young person or adult may be at risk of harm, safeguarding procedures take priority. The matter must be referred promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or appropriate safeguarding lead in accordance with ROC safeguarding arrangements.

Allegations concerning staff, trustees or others working with students may also require referral under the allegations/low-level concerns, disciplinary or relevant safeguarding procedure. Where criminal conduct may have occurred, ROC may need to involve the police or another statutory agency. A complaint will not be delayed simply because another procedure is also being followed, but ROC may pause or adapt its complaints process where this is necessary to protect an investigation or individual rights.

7. Raising a Concern or Complaint

Concerns should be raised as soon as reasonably practicable so that ROC has the best opportunity to understand and resolve the issue. Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the matter complained about or, where there is a series of related events, within three months of the most recent event. ROC may accept a later complaint where there



is a reasonable explanation, safeguarding or welfare considerations, communication barriers, significant new evidence or other exceptional circumstances.

A concern or complaint may be raised verbally, by email, by letter or through another accessible method agreed with ROC. The person raising it should provide, so far as they are able: what happened; when and where it happened; who was involved; what steps have already been taken; and what outcome or resolution they are seeking.

Any staff member who receives a complaint should ensure it is passed promptly to an appropriate senior leader. A staff member should not attempt to investigate a serious complaint themselves unless asked to do so as part of the agreed process.

8. Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Where appropriate, ROC will first seek to resolve a concern informally. A relevant manager or senior leader will normally make contact within 2 working days, clarify the issue, consider any immediate action and seek a practical resolution. A brief record will be kept. ROC will normally provide an informal outcome within 10 working days.

If the person remains dissatisfied, they may request Stage 2 within 10 working days of the Stage 1 outcome. ROC may move directly to Stage 2 where the complaint is serious, complex, concerns a senior leader or cannot reasonably be resolved informally.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

A formal complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days. The Principal, or another appropriate senior leader, will appoint an investigating officer who has not been directly involved in the matter and who can act impartially. Where the complaint concerns the Principal, the Chair of Trustees will arrange the investigation.

The investigation may include meetings or interviews, written statements, review of records, relevant policies, correspondence, student or staff information and other evidence. The complainant and any person whose actions are the subject of the complaint will be given a fair opportunity to provide relevant information.

A written outcome will normally be issued within 20 working days of acknowledgement. If the matter is particularly complex or external information is awaited, ROC will explain the reason for delay and provide a revised timescale. The outcome will state whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld, explain the key reasons and identify any action or learning arising, subject to confidentiality and data-protection requirements.

A request for review should normally be made within 10 working days of the Stage 2 outcome and should explain why a review is sought, for example a material procedural failing, relevant evidence that was not considered, or a conclusion that appears unreasonable on the evidence available.

Stage 3 – Independent Review

Stage 3 is the final internal stage. The Board of Trustees will appoint an appropriate person who has not previously been involved. This may be an uninvolved trustee, a small trustee panel or an independent external reviewer, depending on the nature of the complaint and any



potential conflicts of interest. Where the complaint concerns the Chair of Trustees, another uninvolved trustee will coordinate the review.

The review will normally consider whether the complaint was handled fairly, whether the procedure was followed, whether relevant evidence was considered, whether the conclusions were reasonable and whether further action or learning is required. It is not normally a complete reinvestigation unless the reviewer decides that this is necessary.

The Stage 3 request will be acknowledged within 5 working days and a final internal outcome will normally be issued within 25 working days. The response will confirm the findings, any recommendations or actions and, where applicable, external routes that may remain available.

9. Complaints About Trustees or the Principal

A complaint about the Principal should be sent to the Chair of Trustees. A complaint about the Chair should be directed to another uninvolved trustee, normally the Vice Chair where one is appointed. If a complaint concerns several trustees or creates a significant conflict of interest, the Board may commission an independent external person to manage or review the matter. No person will determine a complaint about their own conduct.

10. External Referral

ROC expects its internal procedure to be completed before an external complaint is made, unless there is an immediate safeguarding, criminal or regulatory reason for doing otherwise. The appropriate external route depends on the nature of the issue.

- For eligible complaints about post-16 education or training provision funded by the Department for Education, a complainant may be able to raise concerns with the Department for Education after completing ROC's internal procedure. The DfE generally considers whether the provider handled the complaint properly rather than substituting its own decision.
- Ofsted does not normally resolve individual further-education complaints. Information about serious or systemic concerns may, however, inform its regulatory or inspection activity, and current Ofsted guidance directs FE complainants to complete the provider procedure and then use the DfE route where applicable.
- The Charity Commission is not a general service-complaints appeal body. It may be appropriate where there is a serious regulatory concern about ROC as a charity, such as serious harm, misuse of charitable funds, serious governance failure or illegal activity.
- The Information Commissioner's Office may be relevant to data-protection concerns after appropriate internal steps have been taken.
- Other routes may include the relevant local authority, police, Equality Advisory and Support Service or another statutory/regulatory body depending on the subject matter.

ROC will provide reasonable information about the relevant external route at the conclusion of Stage 3 where it is able to do so. External bodies apply their own eligibility rules and time limits.

11. Persistent, Unreasonable or Abusive Behaviour

ROC distinguishes between a persistent complainant and unreasonable or abusive behaviour. A person will not be treated as unreasonable simply because they pursue a complaint, disagree with an outcome, ask legitimate questions or seek an available review.



Where contact becomes abusive, threatening, discriminatory, excessively repetitive or places disproportionate demands on staff after the issues have been fully addressed, ROC may set proportionate communication arrangements. These may include nominating a single point of contact, limiting frequency or method of communication, or declining to revisit matters unless significant new evidence is provided. Any restriction will be authorised by the Principal or, where appropriate, the Chair of Trustees, communicated in writing and kept under review.

12. Compliments and Positive Feedback

ROC actively welcomes compliments from students, families, staff, professionals, employers, partners and members of the wider community. Compliments help the college identify what is working well, celebrate contribution, reinforce professional standards and understand the practices that have a positive impact on students.

Compliments may be given verbally, by email or letter, through surveys or feedback forms, through approved online channels, or by speaking to a member of staff or senior leader. Staff receiving a compliment should ensure that significant positive feedback is passed to the appropriate manager or designated person for recording.

Where appropriate, compliments will be shared with the individual, student, team or service concerned. ROC may also use positive feedback for staff recognition, quality assurance, reports to trustees, learning and communication about college strengths. Personal names or identifiable quotations will only be published or shared more widely where this is lawful and appropriate, and consent will be obtained where required.

13. Recording, Confidentiality and Data Protection

ROC will maintain appropriate central records of formal complaints and significant concerns and compliments. Records may include the issue raised, dates, actions, outcomes, learning and whether agreed actions have been completed. Complaint investigation material will be stored securely with access limited to those who need it for legitimate purposes and retained in accordance with ROC's records-retention arrangements.

Information will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed absolutely: information may need to be shared to investigate fairly, respond to safeguarding concerns, obtain professional advice or comply with legal or regulatory duties. Information about disciplinary or employment action concerning another person will not normally be disclosed to a complainant.

14. Learning, Monitoring and Governance

Feedback will be used as a quality-improvement resource rather than treated only as individual casework. Senior leaders will review themes and trends, including recurring concerns, response times, upheld complaints, accessibility issues, compliments, service strengths and actions arising. Where appropriate, completed actions may be revisited to check that improvement has been sustained.

Trustees will receive proportionate information about complaints and compliments so that they can provide oversight without becoming involved in operational case management unless a trustee role is required by this procedure. Reporting should protect confidentiality while



enabling the Board to understand themes, risks, learning and the effectiveness of corrective action.

Learning may inform policy review, staff development, safeguarding practice, communication, curriculum or support arrangements, quality assurance and the Quality Improvement Plan.

15. Roles and Responsibilities

Board of Trustees

- approve and periodically review this policy;
- provide strategic oversight of complaint themes, risks and learning;
- ensure suitable arrangements exist for complaints involving the Principal or trustees;
- receive assurance that agreed actions and improvements are followed through.

Principal and Senior Leadership Team

- ensure the policy is implemented consistently and accessibly;
- allocate appropriately impartial investigators and reviewers;
- monitor timescales, quality of responses, themes and actions;
- ensure complaint and compliment records are maintained securely;
- use feedback to inform quality improvement and staff development.

All Staff

- listen respectfully and respond appropriately when feedback is received;
- recognise when a concern should be escalated or recorded;
- cooperate honestly and promptly with investigations;
- maintain appropriate confidentiality;
- support students to express concerns or compliments in ways that are accessible to them.

16. Related ROC Policies and Procedures

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy / Adult Safeguarding arrangements
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Low-Level Concerns / Allegations arrangements
- Unacceptable Behaviour, Violence and Abuse Policy (where applicable)

17. Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually during the current policy-development cycle and thereafter in accordance with ROC's policy schedule, or earlier where there is a significant change in legislation, statutory guidance, regulatory expectations, organisational structure or learning from complaints and feedback.



Appendix 1 – Quick Guide to Feedback

Type	What it means	What ROC will normally do
Concern	A worry or dissatisfaction that may be resolved quickly.	Listen, clarify, act where possible and record if significant.
Formal complaint	Dissatisfaction requiring investigation and a formal outcome.	Acknowledge, investigate impartially, provide a written outcome and offer internal review.
Compliment	Praise or appreciation about a person, team, service or ROC.	Share appropriately, record significant feedback and use it to recognise strengths and learn.
Safeguarding concern	Information suggesting a student or other person may be at risk of harm.	Refer immediately through safeguarding procedures; safeguarding takes priority over this process.

Internal Complaint Stages

1. Stage 1 – informal resolution, normally within 10 working days.
2. Stage 2 – formal investigation, normally within 20 working days.
3. Stage 3 – independent internal review, normally within 25 working days.
4. External referral – where an appropriate statutory or regulatory route exists after ROC's procedure is complete.

Timescales are normally measured in working days. ROC will explain any significant delay and provide a revised timescale. Accessibility adjustments can be agreed at any stage.