

Compliments & Complaints Policy

Policy Author: Head of Quality

Date of Approval: September 2026

Approved By: SLT Policy Committee

Reviewed: Annually

OUR VISION

**To be an
exceptional college**

OUR MISSION

**Empowering futures,
transforming lives**

OUR CULTURE AND VALUES

Barking & Dagenham College is a unique, diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone is supported to grow, develop and really flourish.

We treat each student as an individual because we know that everyone is different. Every individual has their own unique talents, circumstances, challenges and aspirations. Every student brings something special and it is this diversity and richness of ideas that makes College life interesting, fun and vibrant. Our culture is such that all students, staff and visitors should feel welcome, safe and valued. Guided by our principles of honesty, integrity and transparency, we treat each other respectfully and seek to establish trust. By building resilience and confidence, we encourage students and staff to rise above challenges with determination and a positive mindset.

Whilst we are rightly proud of our unique internal culture, Barking & Dagenham College is an outward facing organisation that recognises the critical importance of working through networks and collaboration to lead change and influence local agendas. By partnering with industry-leading employers and embracing innovation, digital technologies and new ways of thinking, we strive to push the boundaries of learning and ensure that our students are ahead of the curve. Our many stakeholder partnerships mean that we have established our place at the heart of our community and as a key partner in the regeneration of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

At Barking & Dagenham College, we are dedicated to inspiring students and staff to embrace challenges and pursue their dreams with confidence. Most of all, we are ambitious and we expect excellence - from ourselves and from our students.

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Policy Rationale

Feedback gathered through student compliments, comments, concerns, and complaints is central to our Learner Voice initiative. By actively listening to these insights, we drive continuous quality improvement and directly enhance the overall learner experience across the College.

The College understands that raising a concern or complaint is often deeply personal. While the final outcome may not always fully satisfy every party, we ensure the process itself is respectful, prompt, fair, and transparent. We are committed to keeping individuals informed of our progress and reasoning during the process.

Accepted definitions used in this policy

- **Compliment** – An expression of satisfaction made in respect of a member of staff, service, process, system, or facility.
- **Comment:** A mention of something, or a helpful suggestion, on any aspect of college life
- **Concern** – An expression of anxiety, apprehension, misgiving or dissatisfaction that needs to be brought to the attention of the College but falls below the level of a grievance or complaint.
- **Complaint** – A genuine, non-malicious, formal expression of dissatisfaction where the College is thought to have failed to meet expectations or to meet published standards. The issue is acknowledged as such, recorded, and progressed through the College Quality procedures, where an accommodation or resolution is sought to the complainant's satisfaction.

Key Principles

All complaints received staff will be:

- Treated seriously and with sensitivity, dealt with promptly, fairly, and courteously in accordance with college expectations.
- resolved informally wherever possible, and at the lowest level of staffing or management, including mediation and conciliation where possible and appropriate, while respecting the right of the complainant/s to progress a complaint into the formal stage if unresolved at the informal stage.
- addressed with utmost urgency and confidentiality, either within this policy or a more appropriate policy, if the concern or complaint is in respect of wellbeing, safety, victimisation, bullying, radicalisation, financial irregularity, misconduct.
- strictly followed in accordance with policy and procedure.
- referred to the Quality Team on entering the formal stage.
- approached with reason and consistency

Appeal against the outcome of a formal complaint

If a complaint is not resolved through either the informal or formal stages an appeal can be lodged with the Quality team who will ensure that the appeal process is followed and documented.

1 Introduction / Context

High levels of satisfaction across all curriculum and service areas are demonstrated through both formal and informal feedback channels. These include course team meetings, structured surveys, and robust **learner and employer voice processes**. To ensure a complete picture of the learner experience, these institutional metrics are further enriched by independent feedback, such as unsolicited compliments, concerns, and complaints.

2 Scope and Implementation

This Policy serves as a structured framework for addressing and resolving issues within the College and provides a clear set of guidelines and procedures for learners, parents/carers, employers and other stakeholders to voice both their concerns and satisfaction with various aspects of College life. This policy covers all enrolled and former enrolled learners and apprentices at all levels on any mode of learning or funding stream, and encompasses compliments, comment, concerns and complaints made by any stakeholder with an interest in improving the quality of service.

For clarity, it also encompasses learners on both prescribed and non-prescribed higher-level learning (HLL) (i.e., higher education [HE] and higher-level skills [HLS]). Those learners undertaking courses at the College through University partnerships (prescribed HE) need to exhaust the College complaints procedure before progressing to the Partnership processes or to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) on presentation of a Completion of Procedures letter.

This policy will be published on InfoPoint for staff, BDC Online learners, and the College website for the Community, and specifically communicated to all new staff during the staff induction process.

3 General Roles & Responsibilities

- 3.1** All College staff have a responsibility for receiving and dealing appropriately with compliments, comments, concerns, and complaints,
- 3.2** The Quality team coordinate the Compliments, Concerns and Complaints process. The team also provide support and guidance on all matters relating to this Policy.
- 3.3** The Heads of Areas/Teams are responsible for resolving complaints, initially at an informal stage.
- 3.4** For any complaint that enters the formal stage and requires inquiry, the Heads of Areas will be informed. They may inquire themselves or delegate a manager to collect evidence and respond on their behalf but will maintain overall responsibility for monitoring and resolving the issue.
- 3.5** In the event of continuing dissatisfaction by the complainant an appeal, depending on the nature of the appeal, may be progressed to the principal.
- 3.6** For a formal complaint of a particularly serious nature, the Head of Quality may decide to identify an 'Investigating Manager' from an area outside that under investigation to collect evidence and report. This may be an HR representative.
- 3.7** If you are over 18 years of age you should make the complaint yourself, although a parent, carer or friend may help you.

- 3.8** Complainants below the age of 19, those below the age of 24 with learning disabilities or difficulties, or those who may have their understanding and communication ability impaired through language will be entitled to be supported throughout the process by a friend, or learner representative, with Student Learning Services being notified

4 How to make a complaint

4.1 Complaints should be made in the following 4 ways:

- In writing by completing the 'Registering a Complaint' Form, available on reception at all sites
- Remotely via the website on the 'Contact us' page (completed forms are submitted electronically and will be received by the Quality Team).
- By telephone to the Quality Team
- Verbally to a member of staff or course representative. If unable to resolve informally, both quickly and effectively, this will be passed to the Quality Team via email on feedback@bdc.ac.uk to log as a formal complaint.

4.2 The College discourages the use of artificial intelligence or large language models to generate the substantive content of complaints and appeals, as such use can obscure issues, hamper understanding, and delay the process. AI tools may be used only to refine language or structure; submissions must reflect the individual's own account and issues. Revisions may be required where this is not the case.

4.3 If a complaint is made on behalf of another person, confirmation will be required from the complainant before any information is disclosed to another person except in exceptional circumstances.

4.4 Anonymous complaints will not be progressed within this process but will be subject to inquiry or investigation if in scope of wellbeing, safety, victimisation, bullying, radicalisation, or probity.

4.5 Complaints should be raised within twelve months of the original issue(s) so that evidence is available for the investigation.

4.6 Complainants should be aware that our staff have the right to work in a pleasant and safe environment and any violent or abusive behaviour towards staff will not be tolerated

5 Procedures

Stage1: Informal

- 5.1** If there is concern or complaint expressed about an aspect of a course, apprenticeship, member of staff or any of the College's services or facilities, the staff member initially made aware of the issue must deal with the concern and resolve it as quickly as possible. The member of staff must take every opportunity to resolve the complaint informally.
- 5.2** If the issue is beyond the ability of that member of staff to resolve, the most appropriate person to resolve the issue should be contacted and the complainant/s informed of the proposed action.
- 5.3** A learner, or group of learners, highlighting an informal concern may also contact their course representative.
- 5.4** Where a learner, apprentice or employer does not want to approach the person against whom the complaint is being made, then the Curriculum Team Leader, Curriculum Manager, Head of Department, as appropriate, should be contacted.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

- 5.5** If an informal resolution is not found, a 'Registering a Complaint' Form should be completed by the complainant, (with assistance, if required) and sent to the Quality team (see 4.1).
- 5.6** Complainants will not be treated less favorably if they make a complaint. If this is found to be the case staff disciplinary procedures will be followed.
- 5.7** Complainants should be aware that strongly suspected or proven vexatious or malicious complaints will be rejected.
- 5.8** Once received by the Quality Team, all complaints will be entered to the electronic tracking system and acknowledged by the Quality Administrator to the complainant within 5 working days.
- 5.9** The complaint will be allocated to the relevant manager who will contact the complainant as soon as possible to discuss a resolution.
- 5.10** All complaints should be resolved within the first 15 days of submission
- 5.11** The Quality Team will monitor the progress of the complaint and will update the complainant on progress every 15 working days thereafter until the matter is resolved.
- 5.12** In complex cases it may be necessary for a formal investigation to take place. In such circumstances the Head of Quality will identify the need for a formal investigation and the most appropriate Curriculum or Business Support Manager to act as Investigating Manager.
- 5.13** Serious cases involving staff will be discussed with the Head of Human Resources to consider whether any disciplinary action should be taken
- 5.14** The Head of Quality, on appointing an Investigating Manager, will forward all Documentation and Communications
- 5.15** Investigations will be completed as quickly as is possible. The Investigating Manager will collect documentary evidence and may choose to interview the parties involved in the complaint. In such cases, the parties may be accompanied by a friend or representative, but not by a legal or other professional advisor at this stage.
- 5.16** When the complaint has been resolved, the Investigating Manager will compose a letter of response, which will be checked by the Head of Quality before being sent to the complainant.

Stage 3: Appeals

- 5.17** An appeal to the principal may be made in writing within 15 working days of the date on the letter of response if the complainant remains dissatisfied
- 5.18** The principal will determine whether the complaint has been properly dealt with according to the policy and procedures and the judgement is fair and reasonable. A decision will be made within 15 working days.
- 5.19** The principal's decision is final and closes the College's internal complaints process.
- 5.20** Complaints regarding, Higher Education (HE) at this stage may be considered by the university partner (where relevant).

- 5.21** HE students may also contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) – more details are available in their Compliments and Complaints Policy. www.oiahe.org.uk
- 5.22** If adult learners are unsatisfied with the outcome after following the college's procedure, they can escalate their complaint to the GLA by contacting Skillscomplaints@london.gov.uk
- 5.23** For funding related and other issues, <https://www.gov.uk/complain-further-education-apprenticeship?>

Stage 4: External Review of Procedures

If a complaint remains unresolved after all internal stages have been completed, further advice or review can be sought through the UK Government's Education and Learning webpage.
<https://www.gov.uk/browse/education>

If you are still unhappy, you are advised to contact the Agency that monitors the quality of Further Education in this country. The Quality Team will be able to tell you which Agency to contact, how to find the Complaints Procedure and how to contact them. Please do use the Barking & Dagenham College Complaints Guidance before contacting the Agency, as they will not usually deal with complaints unless you have already told us what is wrong and given us the chance to put things right.

If a complaint relates to an issue in respect of an Awarding Body or Awarding Organisation the College will supply contact information for the relevant organisation.

Higher Level Learning learners (level 4 or above) who have exhausted the college complaints procedure and are on a prescribed (funded) Higher Education programme can refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), the independent ombudsman service of last resort, to consider the complaint.

Full details of the scheme are available at: www.oiahe.org.uk

6 Monitoring & Evaluation

- 6.1** The Quality Team maintains a log of all compliments and complaints. To secure ongoing improvement, the overall process will be monitored for consistency, quality of response and compliance with policy, reporting periodically to the Senior Management Team and College Governors.
- 6.2** Heads of Department/Team are provided with feedback on progress in relation to resolution of complaints and this is reported to the Senior Leadership Team and discussed in termly Curriculum Progress Review (CPR) meetings.
- 6.3** Personal data will be handled according to the General Data Protection Regulation 2018. For further information about Data Privacy and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations), please see our website on the following link:

<https://www.barkingdagenhamcollege.ac.uk/en/about-the-college/governance-policy-/gdpr/index.cfm>

7 Appendix 1 - Roles & Responsibilities

All College staff are expected to:

- Treat all complaints seriously, dealing with them promptly and courteously in accordance with the Compliments, Concerns and Complaints policy
- Provide support and guidance to any complainant who requests assistance to access the policy
- Respond promptly to any requests for information
- Treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- Investigate impartially and deal with all information factually to conclude the complaint • Ensure confidentiality is maintained throughout

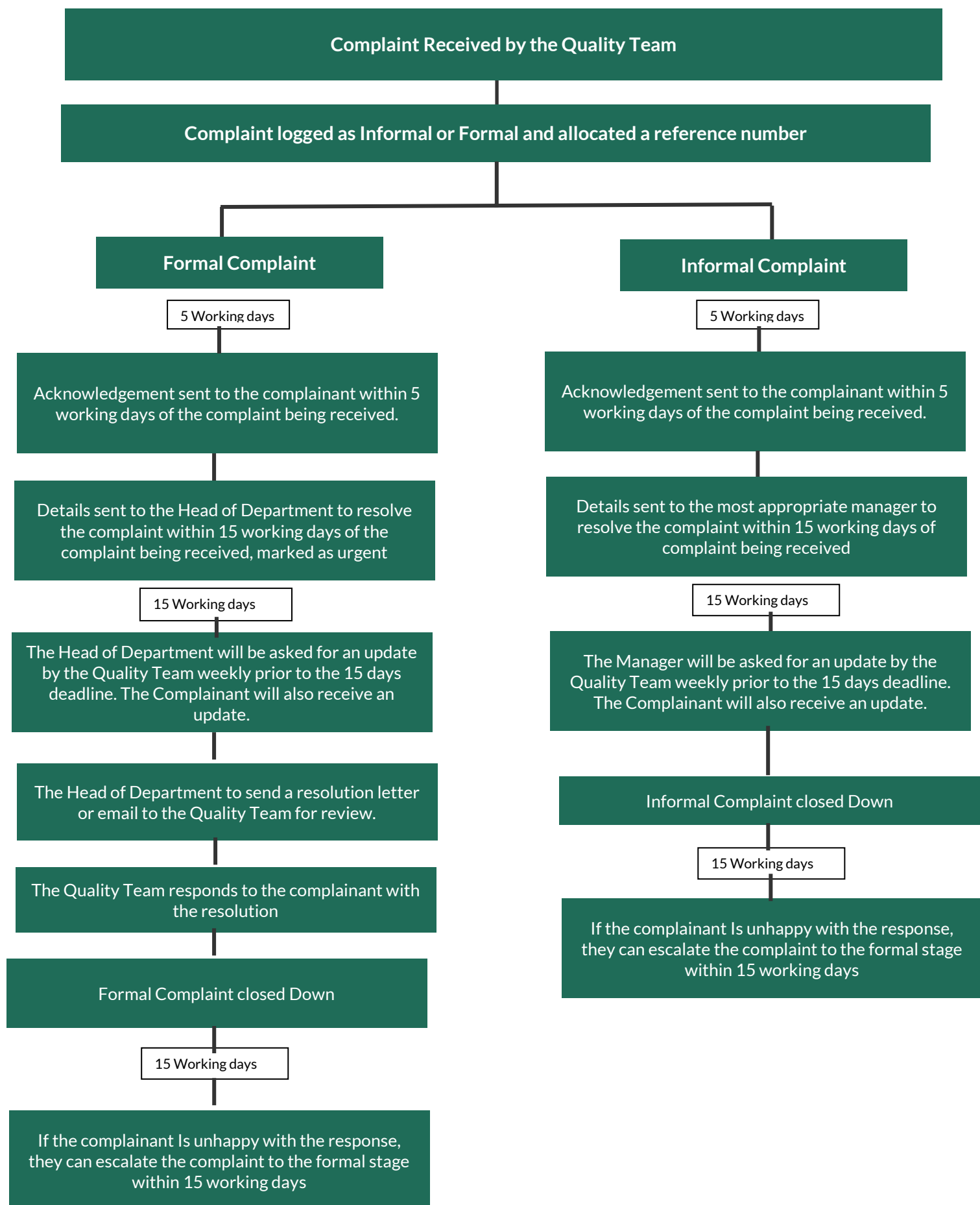
The Quality Team will:

- Acknowledge compliments and complaints within 5 working days of receipt
- Communicate compliments to named members of staff and log on the central webpage.
- Identify and contact an appropriate Investigations Manager for complex, formal complaints
- Monitor the progress of the complaint and update the complainant on progress every 15 working days until the matter is resolved
- Check the letter of response before it is sent to the Customer/Complainant
- Ensure the letter of response, where applicable, has been approved by the Chief Finance & Enterprise Officer
- Maintain a confidential file of all correspondence
- For prescribed HE courses send a Completion of Procedures letter when internal complaints process is exhausted

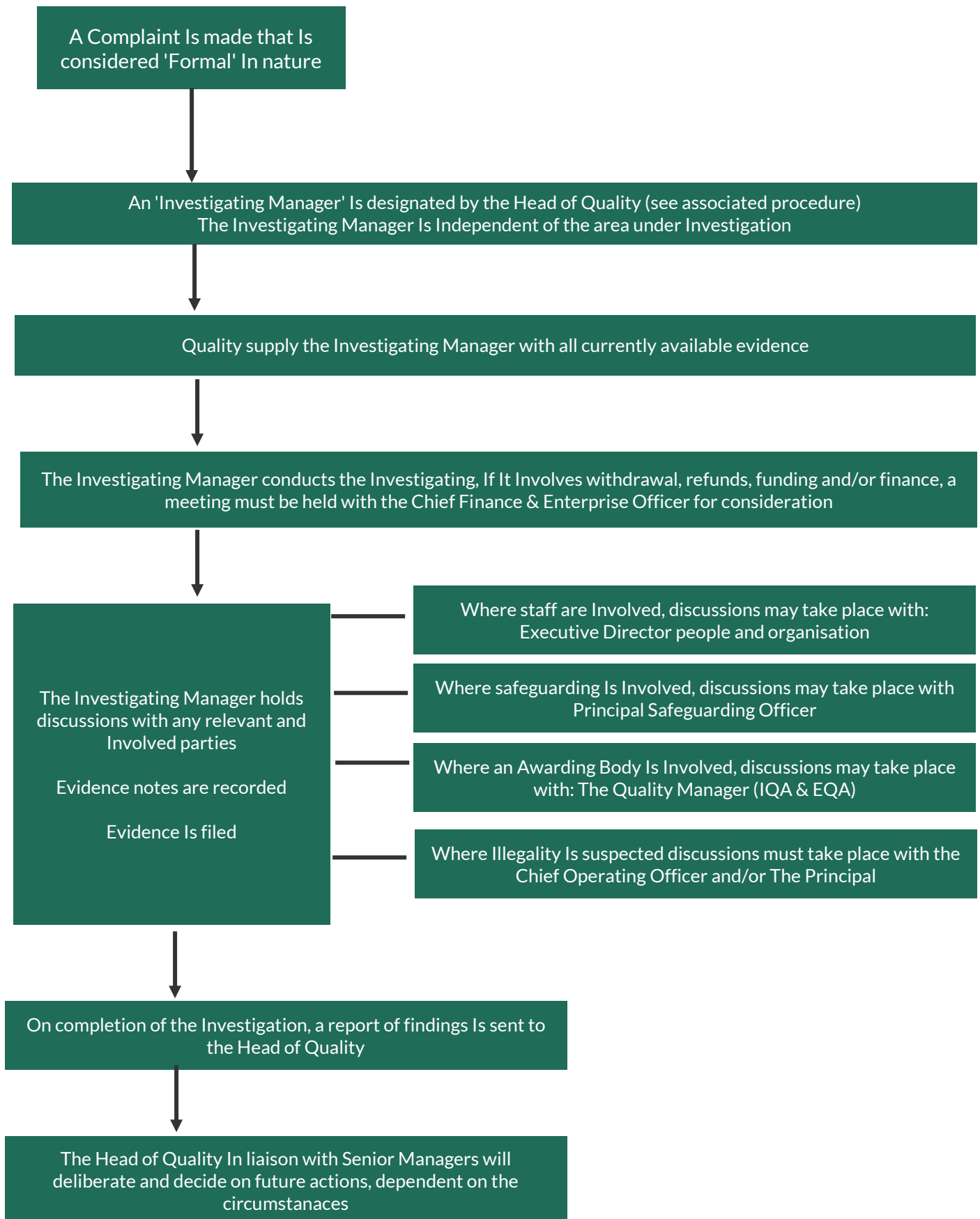
Investigating Managers are expected to:

- Inform the Quality and Transforming Learning Team of any conflict of interest
 - Fully investigate the complaint as quickly as is practicable according to policy and procedures
 - Use the template documentation on the Share point site.
 - Contact the complainant/s as part of the investigation and, on completion, log all contact and evidence with the Quality Team
 - Advise any person named in a complaint of the complaint's procedure
 - If the complaint is of a sufficiently serious nature, take steps to separate the complainant/s and the person named in the complaint
 - Be the main point of contact for the complainant/s
 - Use professional judgement to come to an unbiased conclusion using the facts of the case
 - If the complaint involves withdrawal, refunds, funding and/or finance, the Investigating Manager must hold a meeting with the Deputy Principal Finance & Resources who should approve the resolution letter.
 - Discuss serious cases involving staff with the Head of Human Resources to consider whether any disciplinary action should be taken
 - If the investigation uncovers a safeguarding issue (including a Prevent issue), where the alleged perpetrator is a member of staff, alert the Head of Human Resources
 - If the investigation uncovers a safeguarding issue (including a Prevent issue), even if this is in respect of siblings of the learner, where the alleged perpetrator is NOT a member of staff, alert the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
 - On conclusion of the investigation, a report of the findings will be made to the Head of Quality together with all the evidence collected
- **Deputy Principal Finance & Resources should:**
 - Chair meetings with Investigating manager and others where the complaint has implications for fees
 - Approve any resolution where there are fee, finance, or withdrawal implications

8 Appendix 2



9 Appendix 3 Overview of Complaint Procedure - Investigating Manager



10 Review

This policy will be periodically monitored in light of legislative, regulatory, codifiable of necessary changes, and in any event formally reviewed, and revised if necessary, on an annual basis in July/August.

11 Amendments

Complete table below showing any amendments made from the previous policy

Delete this table if you are submitting a new or policy or is not required

Amendments to Existing Policy

Amendments Made	Page Number	Line/Section Number	Made by	Date
<i>Title Changed: Executive Director. Changed to Head of Quality</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Alison Bartrip</i>	<i>11/05/2023</i>
<i>Appendix 2 Updated</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Alison Bartrip</i>	<i>11/05/2023</i>
<i>Appendix 3 Updated</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Alison Bartrip</i>	<i>11/05/2023</i>
<i>Paragraph Added</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5.26</i>	<i>Alison Bartrip</i>	<i>01/11/2023</i>
<i>Remove References to HE and OiA and Amended job titles and responsibilities</i>			<i>Alison Bartrip</i>	<i>21/09/2026</i>
<i>Improved working in Rationale and Introduction</i>			<i>Alison Bartrip</i>	<i>21/09/2026</i>
<i>Reference to HE/HLL process simplified as we do not have a large provision. Salient points and links covered sufficiently.</i>			<i>Alison Bartrip</i>	<i>21/09/2026</i>