

## COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

Member of Staff Responsible	Deputy Principal
Board of Directors' Committee Responsible	Chair of Board of Directors
Related policies	Protected Disclosure (Whistleblowing)
Implementation date	25 <sup>th</sup> September 2018
Review date	24 <sup>th</sup> September 2020

### 1. POLICY

This policy outlines how Silverstone UTC will deal with compliments, comments and complaints from customers and stakeholders.

Silverstone UTC is committed to having a formal Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy and Procedure which allows customers to provide valuable feedback about our products and services. This will ensure that we provide quality services for our customers and are responsive to their needs.

Customers are defined as: Students, external customers using the UTC facilities, Businesses, Organisations or individuals that the UTC works with or has a business relationship with.

The purpose of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy is:

- a. To encourage customer feedback.
- b. To provide effective means for people who use Silverstone UTC's services to provide feedback, whether positive or negative.
- c. To confirm the individual's right to complain or share their opinions.
- d. To ensure that compliments, comments and complaints are dealt with effectively and impartially.
- e. To direct that complaints should be resolved:
  - as quickly as possible
  - as close to the point of delivery as possible
  - fairly (for all parties)
  - with the minimum of inconvenience to the Complainant
  - In a consultative manner and with the aim of agreeing a solution.
- f. To ensure that we respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner as a key part of our customer service strategy.
- g. To provide a framework for the delivery of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure.

All complaints will be considered as complaints against Silverstone UTC and not against individual members of staff.

The objective of the complaints process is to investigate and improve the services that we offer and to be accountable to our customers and stakeholders. The policy of Silverstone UTC is to respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner. All complaints will be treated seriously.

The Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure will detail minimum expectations, timelines, responsibilities and the agreed process for responding to Customer feedback.

As a minimum, the Deputy Principal will be responsible for making a termly report to the Senior Leadership Team and the Principal an annual report to the Governing Body of Silverstone UTC.

## **2. PROCEDURE FOR COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS**

The objective of this process is to:

1. Implement the compliments, comments and complaints policy for Silverstone UTC.
2. Ensure that we respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a prompt, courteous and confidential manner as a key part of our customer service strategy.
3. Welcome feedback as an opportunity to improve the services that we offer.
4. Encourage a culture of openness around compliments/comments/ complaints.
  - a. To direct that complaints should be resolved:
    - as quickly as possible
    - as close to the point of delivery as possible
    - fairly (for all parties)
    - with the minimum of inconvenience to the Complainant
    - in a personal way, observing best practice for customer service
  - b. To ensure that customer compliments, comments and complaints are used to develop overall improvements to the way that we work.

All compliments, comments and complaints will be treated seriously but should be dealt with informally in the first instance whenever possible and addressed at the point of delivery.

## **3. COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS**

All compliments and comments should be properly acknowledged and the customer thanked for their feedback.

- Compliments or comments received in writing should be acknowledged in writing.
- Whoever receives a compliment or comment should pass it on to the Head of Department and cc to the Deputy Principal in order that the senior managers in Silverstone UTC can understand customer feedback and drive recognition of good performance.

## **4. COMPLAINTS**

### **Informal Complaints - Complaint handling formula**

All team members are involved in customer service so may be involved in handling. Team members dealing with a complaint should work to the following simple formula:

1. Listen
2. Ask questions
3. AGREE a solution – check satisfaction
4. Implement the solution – NOW
5. Follow up and check satisfaction

The aim should be to deal with less significant issues in an informal way at the point of service delivery to ensure a speedy resolution.

### **Internal Customers – students and their parents**

In the first instance, parents or students should discuss their complaint with their Tutor. Many problems can be resolved with this direct interaction. If an immediate resolution is not possible, or the parent or student is not satisfied with the outcome, they should inform their Mentor or another member of the staff team who will ensure that the matter is investigated informally. The member of staff will try to identify an informal solution to the problem.

If the parent or student is not satisfied with the proposed informal solution, they may choose to then make a formal complaint to the Head of Department responsible for their course or Head of Key Stage if the complaint is of a pastoral nature, or they may check to allow alternative solutions to be tried.

If a parent or student needs help in making a formal complaint, this can be obtained either through Reception or by contacting a member of the Student Services team.

### **External Customers**

- External customers are individuals, groups or organisations using Silverstone UTC facilities and businesses, organisations or individuals that the UTC works with or has a business relationship with.
- Informal feedback should initially be directed to a member of staff within the area where the complaint is based. Complaints can often be resolved with this direct interaction.
- However if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome then they may choose to then make a formal complaint to the Head of Department responsible for the area of the complaint.

### **Formal Complaints**

If the customer is not satisfied with the informal resolution to the complaint then the formal complaints process begins.

- A formal complaint is one received in writing via letter or email or made over the telephone to a member of staff that is identified as such. Alternatively a complaint initially dealt with informally can be made formal at the request of the customer. Silverstone UTC will not ask customers to put complaints in writing in order to trigger the formal complaints process.
- Formal complaints must be logged, investigated and the outcome recorded. The Deputy Principal is responsible for monitoring complaints so must be made aware of formal complaints as soon as they are received. The PA to the Principal is responsible for recording complaints and logging all related correspondence so should be cc'd on all interactions.
- Scanned/emailed copies of all complaints should be sent to the Deputy Principal as soon as they are received, cc PA to the Principal.
- Notes of any telephone conversations should be taken and copies kept of all correspondence.

### Stage 1 – receipt of complaint/processing/immediate response

- Once the complaint has been received by the Deputy Principal it is forwarded IMMEDIATELY (within 2 working hours) to the Head of Department responsible. Email should be used whenever possible.
- Once acknowledged, this person then becomes the owner of the complaint.
- Upon being designated, the complaint owner (or the Deputy Principal if no relevant Head of Department has taken ownership at this point), then they should contact the customer IMMEDIATELY (within 2 working hours), by telephone if possible, to explain that they are dealing with the complaint, to give the customer their contact details and to agree the timeframe for resolution.

### Stage 2 – Investigation/Agreement of resolution/Confirmation of resolution

The complaint owner takes the following action:

- Investigate the complaint by interviewing staff or customers as necessary. Notes should be taken of phone calls and meetings.
- Consult with their line manager or Deputy Principal if appropriate.
- Agree the resolution with the customer within two working days of receipt of the complaint or within the previously agreed timeline.
- Resolution should be presented/agreed in person where possible or, failing that, by telephone. Resolution should only be presented in writing if no other contact details are available or if specifically requested by the complainant.
- The target timeframe to agree a resolution to a complaint with all customers is **within two working days of receipt**. This may not be possible in all cases, in which case the customer should be informed of the proposed timeframe to agree a resolution.

If the customer is satisfied:

- Inform the Deputy Principal of the agreed resolution and follow up in writing to the customer to confirm it within a further 5 working days.
- ALL written responses to complainants are to be signed off by the Deputy Principal prior to being sent unless specifically agreed otherwise.

### Stage 3 – Escalation

If the customer remains dissatisfied following the response from the manager the complaint is escalated to the Deputy Principal.

Deputy Principal is now the complaint owner and will do the following:

- Deputy Principal will contact the customer IMMEDIATELY to explain that they are now dealing with the complaint and to agree the next step – in most cases this will be a face-to-face meeting
- Deputy Principal will write to the customer to confirm that they are dealing with the complaint and to provide a copy of the Silverstone UTC Compliments, Comment and Complaints Procedure
- Deputy Principal to meet with the customer or speak on the telephone and agree a solution/give a response
- Follow up in writing – copies to PA to Principal

#### **Stage 4 – Appeal**

If the customer is still not satisfied after the previous steps they may appeal in writing to the Principal within 10 working days. The Principal will consult with colleagues who have been involved in the complaint, meet with the complainant to hear the appeal and give a final decision.

#### **Stage 5 – Final Appeal**

In exceptional circumstances if the customer is still not satisfied after the previous steps they may appeal in writing to the Governing Body within 10 working days. The Chair of Governors or the Clerk will convene a Governing Body complaints panel.

The Governors' appeal hearing is the last UTC-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened to merely rubber-stamp previous decisions. Parents must be allowed to attend and they may be accompanied if they wish.

Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The Governing Body will nominate a number of members with delegated powers to hear complaints at this stage and set out its terms of reference. These will include:

- Drawing up its procedures;
- Hearing individual appeals;
- Making recommendations on policy as a result of complaints.

The procedure adopted by the panel for hearing appeals will be part of the UTC's complaints procedure. The panel will be drawn from nominated members and will consist of three governors and at least one person who is independent of the management and running of the academy. The panel may choose their own chair.

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the UTC's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

There are several points which any Governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, Governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of Governor and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.
- b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the UTC and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour.

It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations which will satisfy the complainant that the complaint has been taken seriously.

- c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is appropriate and not adversarial.
- d. Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

## **Stage 6**

There is no appeal beyond the Panel to the Governing Body. Further appeal is only possible through the Education Funding Agency.

## **5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **The Role of the Clerk**

The Clerk will be the contact point for the complainant and be required to:

- set the date, time and venue of the hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the hearing;
- meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the hearing;
- record the proceedings;
- notify all parties of the panel's decision.

### **The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor**

The Nominated Governor role:

- check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- if a hearing is appropriate, notify the Clerk to arrange the panel.

### **The Role of the Chair of the Panel**

The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- the remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- the issues are addressed;
- key findings of fact are made;

- parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease;
- the hearing is conducted with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy;
- the panel is open minded and acting independently;
- no member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions;
- written material is seen by all parties. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

### **Notification of the Panel's Decision**

The Chair of the Panel will ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response within 5 working days. The letter will explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

### **Checklist for a Panel Hearing**

The panel will take the following points into account:

- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Principal may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Principal is then invited to explain the UTC's actions and be followed by the UTC's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Principal and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Principal is then invited to sum up the UTC's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.

### **General Notes on formal complaint handling process**

- All complaints will be considered as complaints against Silverstone UTC and not against individual members of staff.
- Every communication either from the complainant or from the UTC should be copied to the Deputy Principal and the PA to the Principal.
- Notes will be kept of meetings, all telephone calls will be logged and this information will be copied to the PA to the Principal for filing with the complaint.
- The appropriate manager will give a full written response to the complaint within 7 working days of receipt wherever possible.
- This response should be forwarded prior to dispatch to the Deputy Principal for checking for consistency with College standards.
- When this is not possible explanation will be given in writing to the customer within ten days with a proposed schedule for response.
- The final response should include an explanation to the customer of how to take their complaint further, if necessary.

- All complaints will be treated as confidential and will be handled with sensitivity by the investigating manager.

### **Monitoring and Quality Assurance**

The Deputy Principal will present a termly report to the Senior Leadership Team and an interim and annual report for Silverstone UTC Governing Body summarising the complaints during the year. This will be based on an analysis of the year's complaints organised by curriculum area, category of complaint, and type of complainant. The Deputy Principal will be responsible for investigating and responding to any queries arising from the annual report to the Silverstone UTC Governing Body.

# Customer Complaint Procedure Flow Chart September 2016

