LINCOLN COLLEGE

STUDENT COMPLAINT AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE – HIGHER EDUCATION

POLICY CQ/PO/9

SPONSOR

Director – Performance & Standards

Last Updated: August 2026 Last Reviewed: August 2026 Next Review Period: August 2027

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Lincoln College strives to treat all its members and visitors fairly and aims to eliminate all forms of unlawful discrimination, specifically across all protected characteristics. We will work towards a fair and just organisation and promote inclusion for all those impacted by Lincoln College and the wider community.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

CONTENTS

1. PURPOSE 1
2. AIMS 1
3. INTRODUCTION 1
4. SCOPE OF THIS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE 2
5. RESOLVING COMPLAINTS 4
6. WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT 4
7. INFORMAL CONCERNS 5
    7.1. How to Raise a Concern 5
    7.2. Who Handles Concerns 5
    7.3. Encouragement of Informal Resolution 5
    7.4. No Need for Written Complaints (Initially) 5
    7.5. Timeframe for Resolution 5
    7.6. Moving to Formal Complaint 5
8. FORMAL COMPLAINT 6
9. APPEALLING THE OUTCOME OF THE FORMAL INVESTIGATION 7
10. NEXT STEPS 8
11. REPETITIOUS AND VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS 9
    11.2. Repetitious Complaints 9
    11.3. Vexatious Complaints 9
12. COMPLAINTS PURSUED IN AN OTHERWISE UNREASONABLE MANNER 10
    12.2. Aims 10
    12.3. General Principles 11
    12.4. Persistent Complainants 11
    12.5. Action to be Taken 12
    12.6. Complaint Campaigns 13
13. APPENDIX A – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES 14
    13.1. Complainant 14
    13.2. Investigator 14
    13.3. Complaints Co-ordinator 15
14. APPENDIX B – VALIDATING ORGANISATION PROCEDURES 16
    14.1. Chartered Management Institute (CMI) 16

15. APPENDIX C – COMPLAINTS FLOWCHART 17
16. APPENDIX D – CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS FORM 18

LINCOLN COLLEGE

CUSTOMER COMPLAINT AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

1. PURPOSE

1.1. This procedure applies to all Higher Education students of Lincoln College and is designed to give the opportunity to have complaints and grievances dealt with fairly and consistently. Complaints relating to Further Education and Training provision should use the 'Customer Complaints and Grievance Procedure – Further Education and Training'. The procedure is not for use by college staff to make a complaint.

1.2. The purpose of the procedure is to maintain a high standard of customer care and rectify causes of dissatisfaction as quickly as possible.

1.3. This procedure should be considered in conjunction with the Admissions Policy and the Student Assessment and Appeals Policy.

2. AIMS

2.1. The procedure aims to ensure that all complaints and grievances are dealt with fully, promptly and allow all persons involved the opportunity to state their point of view.

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1. It is expected that, except in exceptional and fully documented circumstances, a customer who wishes to make a complaint will invoke the Informal Stage within three calendar months of the incident which is the cause for complaint.

3.2. All complaints and grievances will be handled as confidential matters.

3.3. Any person making a complaint will have the right to appeal against any judgement made as a result of the Student Complaint and Grievance Procedure being used.

3.4. Any person involved will have the right to be accompanied by an advocate (who may be a member of staff, another learner of the college or a relative) during any part of the Student Complaint and Grievance Procedure.

3.5. Advocates can be used by those individuals who are not able or do not feel sufficiently confident to represent themselves.

3.6. Students who have a disability that prevents them from submitting a written complaint may request that a member of staff completes any required documentation on their behalf.

3.7. Where it is not possible to deal with a complaint or grievance to the satisfaction of the student then the reason given will be provided in writing to them.

3.8. The College will normally seek to complete all stages of its internal complaints procedure, including any appeal stage, within 90 calendar days. Where a complaint is particularly complex and additional time is required, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and provided with a revised timescale.

3.9. In the rare event that complaints are vexatious or malicious, students bringing those complaints may be subject to the college's HE Student Conduct Procedure.

4. SCOPE OF THIS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

4.1. This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Lincoln College, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs. https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy. Contacting our Safeguarding Team is easy. You can reach them through a Single Point of Contact (SPoC) during office hours, Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 4:00pm, on 07580 975854 or safeguarding@lincolncollege.ac.uk. Further information can be found on our website: https://www.lincolncollege.ac.uk/support/safeguarding-and-mental-health
Exclusion of learners from college*	Matters relating to learner exclusions are covered by the colleges Learner Conduct Procedure at https://www.lincolncollege.ac.uk/management-and-governance under "Policies"
Rejected course applications and exclusions in the first academic term.	Please refer to the college Admissions Policy at https://www.lincolncollege.ac.uk/management-and-governance under "Admissions and open days".

Exceptions	Who to contact
Request for a review of an internal assessment mark	Procedures for assessment review are not part of the complaints process, and are covered by the Learner assessment and appeals policy and procedures – Further education and training at https://www.lincolncollege.ac.uk/management-and-governance under “Policies”.
Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus .
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the college’s internal grievance procedures, and should be discussed with your line manager or people services as appropriate.
Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be referred to our People Services department and dealt with under the college’s internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
Awarding organisation regulations	Awarding organisation regulations cannot be challenged by the college, any concerns should be raised with the awarding organisation directly.
Exam concessions	Exam concessions are dealt with through the student services team who send your information to the awarding organisation who makes the decision, where a concession isn’t granted they will assist you in appealing the outcome with the awarding organisation.
Remarking of examined work	Requests for a review of the marking of an externally set exam should be sent to the exams team exams@lincolncollege.ac.uk with the subject Exam Remark Request who will be able to advise on the correct process for the awarding organisation.

5. RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

5.1. At each stage in the procedure, Lincoln College wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review college policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

6. WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

6.1. If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

7. INFORMAL CONCERNS

7.1. How to Raise a Concern

7.1.1. If you have a concern about something at the college, you can talk to a staff member directly or call them.

7.1.2. Someone else (like a family friend or relative) can raise a concern for you, but only if you give them permission in writing.

7.2. Who Handles Concerns

7.2.1. Most concerns can be sorted out by talking to your teacher, CPD coach, the relevant departments Curriculum Lead or the person who has direct responsibility for the issue.

7.2.2. You should not raise your concern with the person who is the subject of the complaint, or with senior leaders, governors or other staff members who aren't directly involved.

7.3. Encouragement of Informal Resolution

7.3.1. The college encourages learners and their parents/legal guardians to talk to staff informally about any worries.

7.3.2. The goal is to solve problems through open conversation and mutual understanding, without needing to start a formal complaint process.

7.4. No Need for Written Complaints (Initially)

7.4.1. Usually, you don't need to write down your complaint at first. This keeps things less formal and helps you feel more comfortable expressing your concerns.

7.5. Timeframe for Resolution

7.5.1. The college aims to resolve informal concerns within 5 working days.

7.6. Moving to Formal Complaint

7.6.1. If your concern isn't resolved informally and you want to take it further, you should fill out a complaints form and send it to the college within 5 working days.

7.6.2. At this point, the Student Experience and Compliance Team is notified, and the formal complaint process begins.

8. FORMAL COMPLAINT

8.1. Formal complaints must be made to the college's Student Experience and Compliance Team, in writing (preferably on the Online Complaint Form or Word Template), by email to complaints@lincolncollege.ac.uk, by calling 01522 876000, or in person at one of the college's campuses main receptions in Lincoln, Newark or the ASI. Someone else (like a family friend or relative) can raise a concern for you, but only if you give them permission in writing.

8.2. A member of the Student Experience and Compliance Team will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within three college working days.

8.3. The response will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. Depending on the complexity of the complaint a face-to-face meeting may be requested.

8.4. A nominated member of the college's senior leadership team will investigate the complaint and decide on the outcome, investigation activities may be delegated to other members of the leadership team depending on the scale of the investigation.

8.5. During the investigation, the investigator/s will:

8.5.1. if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish

8.5.2. keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

8.5.3. At the conclusion of their investigation, the nominated member of college's SLT will provide a formal written response within 30 college days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the SLT member is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

8.6. The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Lincoln College will take to resolve the complaint.

8.7. The SLT member will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome.

8.8. If the complaint is about the principal, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at the formal investigation stage.

8.9. Complaints about the principal or member of the governing body must be made to the Governance Officer.

8.10. If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

8.11. The formal investigation will be conducted by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

9. APPEALLING THE OUTCOME OF THE FORMAL INVESTIGATION

9.1. This is the final stage of the complaint procedure.

9.1.1. A request to escalate to the appeals process must be made to the Student Experience and Compliance Team in writing and be received within 10 working days of receipt of the written confirmation of the formal investigation into the complaint.

9.2. A member of the Student Experience and Compliance Team will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five working days.

9.3. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

9.4. All appeals must follow the procedure noted in the College Appeals Panel Policy and Procedure (Policy CQ/PO/26) which can be obtained by contacting quality@lincolncollege.ac.uk.

9.5. The composition of the College Appeals Panel is flexible to suit the nature of the appeal but will include:

- A member of the Lincoln College Group Leadership Team (as chair)
- A learner/student representative
- A member of the college's Performance and Standards Team
- A panel member with specialist knowledge
- A member the college's governing board
- The College Appeals Panel will be supported by a non-voting administrative support officer.

9.6. If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the College Appeals Panel will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the college's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

9.7. The Chair of the College Appeals Panel will provide the complainant and Lincoln College with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five working days. Where a student remains dissatisfied following completion of the College's complaints procedure, they may have the right to refer the matter to the relevant validating partner in accordance with that organisation's complaints procedures. Details of any further complaint stages available through the validating partner will be provided to the student within the outcome correspondence.

9.8. Once all relevant internal complaint procedures have been exhausted, a Completion of Procedures Letter will be issued. This letter confirms the final outcome of the complaint and provides information regarding any remaining rights of review available to the student.

10. NEXT STEPS

10.1. Students who remain dissatisfied following completion of the College's complaints procedure may, where applicable, refer their complaint to the relevant validating partner in accordance with that organisation's complaints procedures.

10.2. Students should complete all available internal complaint procedures, including any applicable validating partner procedures, before seeking an external review.

10.3. Following completion of all relevant procedures, students may refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for independent review.

11. REPETITIOUS AND VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

11.1. There are rare circumstances where Lincoln College will deviate from the Complaints Procedure. These include, but are not limited to, repetitious complaints, vexatious complaints, and complaints pursued in an otherwise unreasonable manner.

11.2. Repetitious Complaints

11.2.1. Where a complaint is the same as, similar to, or based on the same facts as a complaint that has already been fully considered, and Lincoln College has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns and provided a clear statement of its position and available options, the College will write to the complainant to advise that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and that no further correspondence relating to those matters will be considered. The complainant will be referred to Stage 4.

11.3. Vexatious Complaints

11.3.1. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a frivolous or vexatious complaint as complaints which are:

- obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious;
- insist upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- pursue otherwise meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner; are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- or seek redress that lacks any serious purpose or value.

11.3.2. Examples may include:

- refusal to clearly articulate the complaint, specify its grounds, or identify the outcome sought despite offers of assistance;
- refusal to co-operate with an investigation;
- refusal to accept that certain issues are outside the scope of the complaint's procedure;
- insisting that complaints be handled in ways incompatible with the procedure or accepted good practice;
- introducing trivial or irrelevant information and expecting it to be considered or commented upon;

- raising large numbers of detailed but insignificant questions and demanding immediate responses;
- making unjustified complaints about staff members and seeking their replacement;
- changing the basis of a complaint during the course of an investigation; seeking unrealistic outcomes, such as the inappropriate dismissal of staff;
- making excessive demands on college time through frequent, lengthy or complex contact;
- knowingly providing false information; or publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

12. COMPLAINTS PURSUED IN AN OTHERWISE UNREASONABLE MANNER

12.1. The majority of concerns and complaints can be addressed effectively through the informal or formal stages of Lincoln College's Complaints Procedure. However, there are occasions when complainants behave unreasonably when raising or pursuing concerns. In such cases, their actions may begin to have a negative impact on the day-to-day operation of the College and on the wellbeing of students and staff. In these exceptional circumstances, Lincoln College may take the actions outlined below.

12.2. Aims

12.2.1. The aim of this procedure is to:

- uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between Lincoln College and individuals wishing to raise concerns or pursue complaints;
- support the wellbeing of students, staff, governors, members, parents, carers and others with a legitimate interest in the work of the College;
- deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints or who harass College staff, whilst ensuring that other stakeholders do not suffer detriment.

12.3. General Principles

12.3.1. When a complaint or concern has been raised formally or informally, the complainant can expect Lincoln College to:

- communicate regularly in writing where appropriate;
- make them aware of the Complaints Procedure and the procedure for dealing with persistent or vexatious complaints;
- respond within a reasonable timeframe;
- make staff available for consultation within reasonable limits, treat them with courtesy and respect;
- and attempt to resolve concerns through reasonable means in line with the Complaints Procedure, relevant policies and statutory guidance.

12.3.2. In turn, Lincoln College expects complainants to treat all staff with courtesy and respect, recognise and respect the needs and wellbeing of students and staff, avoid any use or threat of violence, refrain from aggressive or abusive behaviour, recognise the time constraints under which staff work, allow a reasonable period for responses, understand that resolving concerns may take time, and follow the College's Complaints Procedure.

12.4. Persistent Complainants

12.4.1. For the purposes of this procedure, a persistent complainant is an individual who repeatedly raises concerns or complaints, either formally or informally, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may include actions that are:

- obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious;
- excessive correspondence, emails or telephone contact;
- excessive or unreasonable use of Freedom of Information requests;
- insistence on pursuing unsubstantial complaints or unrealistic outcomes;
- pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- insisting on dealing only with senior leaders regardless of the nature of the issue or established delegation arrangements;

- or repeatedly pursuing complaints when the outcome cannot be altered because the desired resolution falls outside the College's authority or would be unlawful.

12.4.2. For the purposes of this procedure, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions in a way that targets one or more members of staff over a prolonged period, causes ongoing distress, has a significant adverse impact on the College community, or is perceived as intimidating or oppressive. This can include persistent demands or criticism that, while perhaps minor when viewed individually, have a cumulative effect on confidence, wellbeing and health.

12.5. Action to be Taken

12.5.1. Where a complainant's behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable or unacceptable, Lincoln College will normally inform the complainant verbally in the first instance. They will be advised that, unless their behaviour changes, action may be taken in accordance with this procedure. This warning will be confirmed in writing.

12.5.2. If the behaviour does not improve, a decision will be made by the principal and an appropriate senior leader regarding the actions required, taking into account the nature of the behaviour and its impact on the college community. Such actions may include:

- informing the complainant in writing that their behaviour is considered unreasonable or unacceptable;
- requiring meetings with staff to be attended by a second member of staff, with notes being taken;
- restricting routine communication to written correspondence;
- taking HR or legal advice regarding threats, aggression or harassment;
- considering temporary restrictions on access to college premises where appropriate; seeking legal advice regarding anti-harassment legislation;
- or implementing a specific process under which the complainant communicates through an appointed representative rather than directly with senior leaders.

12.5.3. Where persistent or harassing behaviour ceases but subsequently resumes within a reasonable period, Lincoln College may

recommence this process at an appropriate stage. In such circumstances, legal or HR advice may be sought at the outset.

12.6. Complaint Campaigns

12.6.1. For the purposes of this policy, a complaint campaign is defined as complaints from three or more separate individuals, whether or not connected with Lincoln College, concerning the same subject matter.

12.6.2. Depending on the circumstances, Lincoln College may depart from the standard complaints procedure and instead issue a template response to all complainants and/or publish a single response on the College website.

13. APPENDIX A – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

13.1. Complainant

13.1.1. The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the college in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

13.2. Investigator

13.2.1. The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:

- sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
- interviewing staff and learner's and other people relevant to the complaint
- consideration of records and other relevant information
- analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

13.2.2. The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond

- prepare a comprehensive report that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems, and will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

13.3. Complaints Co-ordinator

13.3.1. This will be a member of the Student Experience and Compliance Team.

13.3.2. The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure

13.3.3. and be aware of issues regarding:

- sharing third party information
- additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.
- however, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the learner to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the learner's best interests.
- the welfare of the learner is paramount.

14. APPENDIX B – VALIDATING ORGANISATION PROCEDURES

14.1. Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

14.1.1. Following completion of the College Formal Investigation (5.3), dissatisfied students enrolled on CMI accredited provision may refer their complaint to the CMIU by going to:

- https://www.managers.org.uk/~/media/Angela-Media-Library/New%20EP/PolicesProcedures/Procedures/CMI%20Complaints%20Procedure.pdf

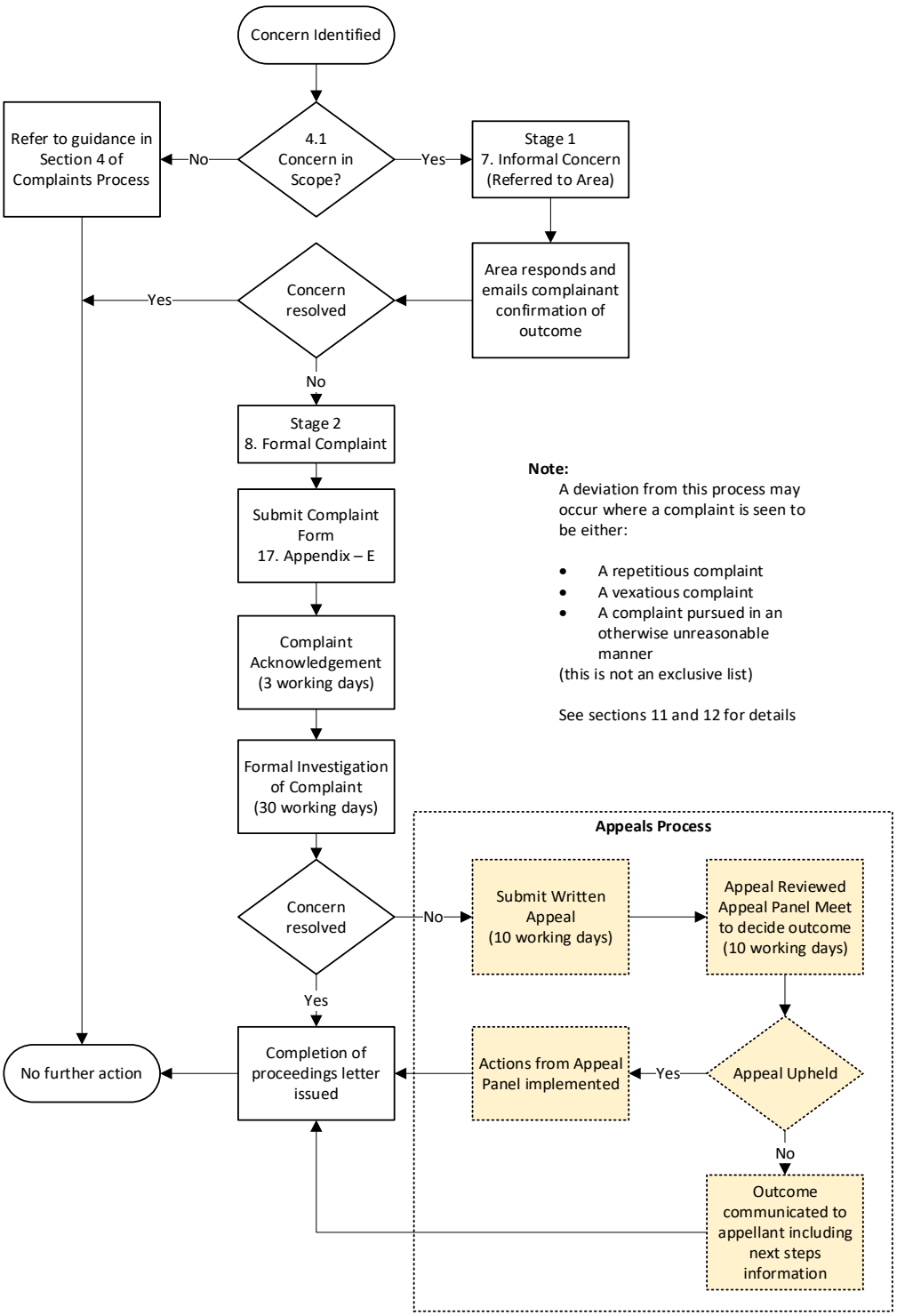
14.2. LINCOLN BISHOP UNIVERSITY Following completion of the College Formal Investigation, dissatisfied students enrolled on Lincoln Bishop University validated courses may refer their complaint to the University. The policies and procedures are available at Policies and Procedures | Lincoln Bishop University

14.3. UNIVERSITY OF HULL Following completion of the College Formal Investigation, dissatisfied students enrolled on University of Hull validated courses may refer their complaint to the University. The University of Hull policies and procedures are available at https://www.hull.ac.uk/choose-hull/university-and-region/key-documents/quality

14.4. OPEN UNIVERSITY Following completion of the College Formal Investigation, dissatisfied students enrolled on Open University validated courses may refer their complaint to the University. Information regarding the OU complaints procedures is available at https://help.open.ac.uk/browse/policies-and-complaints/complaints-and-appeals

14.5. UNIVERSITY OF DERBY Following completion of the College Formal Investigation, dissatisfied students enrolled on University of Derby validated courses may refer their complaint to the University. Information regarding the University of Derby complains procedures is available at Complaints Procedure - Academic regulations - University of Derby

15. APPENDIX C – COMPLAINTS FLOWCHART



16. APPENDIX D – CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to complaints@lincolncollege.ac.uk who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name	
Learner's name and your relationship to the learner (if relevant)	
Address	
Postcode	
Contact telephone numbers	Day time Evening
Email	
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the college about it.	

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details	
Signature	
Date	

Official use

Complaint Reference	