

COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS & COMPLIMENTS POLICY

Responsible for Implementation: Head of Compliance

Latest Review Date: June 2026

Next Review Date: September 2027

Responsible for Implementation: Head of Compliance (Sean South)

Latest Review Date: May 2026 (*Updated to reflect the multi-department operational structure*) **Next Review Date:** May 2027

1. About Us

Access Further Education Limited ('The College' / 'AFE') has subsidiary companies, trading names, and trading partnerships through which it operates across 26 sites, serving over 5,000 students and apprentices. The trading names and partnerships might have their own names or brands, but the legal entity for the purpose of this policy is Access Further Education Limited. Trading subsidiaries, trading names, and trading partnerships include Access Creative College ('ACC'), Access Industry, and Access Sport College.

2. Policy Statement & Context

Access Further Education (AFE) is committed to providing the best possible service for all of its learners and apprentices. We acknowledge that learners can at times feel dissatisfied and are entitled to have their concerns listened to and addressed quickly and effectively.

Early Resolution at Site Level

Normally, learners and apprentices are expected to raise their concerns in the first instance with the appropriate tutors, and then with their **Head of Centre (Access Creative College)/ Area Manager (Access Sport College) Head of Quality and Curriculum (Access Industry)**. A complaint can often be resolved quickly and simply at a local level. Sites are expected to demonstrate operational resilience and exhaust local resolution pathways before escalating to the formal CCC process.

Formal Escalation

If a complainant is not satisfied with the response made by their local centre, or if the severity of the issue warrants immediate formal intervention, a formal complaint may be raised through the College's senior management team via the CCC database.

Higher Education Provision: If you are a learner studying on a Higher Education programme validated by Nottingham Trent University (NTU), formal complaints that remain unresolved following AFE's internal procedures must be escalated via NTU in accordance with their arrangements.

3. Application

These procedures are primarily for the use of all AFE learners and apprentices (or their parents or guardians). In addition, they may be used by employers, visitors, or partners who make permitted use of college services, facilities, and premises. In most circumstances, any staff wishing to initiate a personal grievance or complaint should use the appropriate **People Services (HR)** procedures.

4. Operational Structure & Responsible Parties

To manage higher volumes of incoming feedback, AFE operates a distributed investigation model. While the **Head of Compliance** monitors the inbox and acts as the final arbiter, specific **Heads of Department (HoD)** lead investigations, implement interventions, and draft responses within their operational domains:

Complaint Category / Trend	Investigating Departmental Lead	Role & Scope
Final Decisions, Governance, & Appeals	Head of Compliance (Sean South)	Acts as arbiter for all outcomes; tests the validity of responses before they are sent; compiles monthly trend reports.
Safeguarding & Student Behaviour	Head of Safeguarding	Leads on safeguarding issues, welfare concerns, and associated learner behavioral issues.

	<i>(Chelsea Evans)</i>	
Learner Support & Accommodations	Head of Learner Support <i>(Lee Browning Beales)</i>	Leads on support provision complaints, ALS dissatisfaction, and related behavioral or staff-clash items.
Bursaries & Free School Meals	Head of MIS <i>(Jan Lansdale)</i>	Leads on non-payment of bursaries, financial processing errors, and FSM administration.
Admissions & Advice (IAG)	Head of Admissions <i>(Jo Graham / Jen McArthur)</i>	Leads on application issues, enrolment errors, and pre-course Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG).
Grading, Curriculum, & Exams	Compliance, Curriculum, Maths/English & Exams <i>(S. South / J. Betts / J. Lewton / S. Graham)</i>	Jointly lead on academic appeals, course delivery quality, grading disputes, and exam administration.

Aftercare & Withdrawn Learners	Head of Careers <i>(Jon Domaile)</i>	Leads on next steps, IAG, and exit support for complainants who have withdrawn from their programmes.
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5. Procedure for Formal Complaints

Step 1: Submission

If a learner, parent, guardian, employer, visitor, or partner wishes to make a formal complaint, comment, or compliment, they must submit it via:

- **Email:** ccc.admin@accesstomusic.ac.uk
- **Phone:** 0161 247 8088

Note: All formal submissions—including those initially routed via automated tools (AI) or escalated directly to executive or CEO email addresses—will be logged into the centralized CCC system. Complainants must provide a valid telephone number so investigators can gather additional context.

- **Action by:** Complainant

Step 2: Logging & Triage

All formal complaints are logged securely in the College's complaints database. A standard acknowledgment or holding email is sent to the complainant within **5 working days** (excluding weekends and bank holidays).

- **Action by:** CCC Administrator

Step 3: Assignment to Departmental Lead

The CCC Administrator forwards the complaint summary, transcript, and historical context to the relevant Head of Department (as defined in Section 4).

- *Cross-Departmental Clause: If a complaint covers multiple areas (e.g., a bursary issue linked to a safeguarding vulnerability), it will be reviewed and co-investigated by more than one Head of Department.*
- **Action by:** CCC Administrator

Step 4: Investigation

The assigned Head of Department/Investigating Officer acknowledges the investigation to the complainant via email or telephone. They will interview relevant parties, examine pertinent evidence, and action any necessary operational interventions to resolve the underlying problem.

- **Action by:** Assigned Head of Department (HoD)

Step 5: Data Protection & Sensitivity

Investigations requiring access to sensitive or personal data (under the Data Protection Act and GDPR compliance) will be handled with strict confidentiality. The Investigating Officer will only share this information with college staff members where it is strictly pertinent to the investigation.

- **Action by:** Investigating Officer / Head of Compliance

Step 6: Quality Assurance & Arbitration

The Head of Department completes their report and drafts a proposed response. Before anything is sent to the complainant, the **Head of Compliance** acts as an arbiter to test the validity of the response and verify that the outcome matches AFE policies and regulatory guidelines.

- **Action by:** Head of Compliance & Investigating HoD

Step 7: Resolution & Sign-Off

The formal investigation must be completed within **15 working days** of receipt. Once validated by Compliance, the final response email highlighting the findings and outcomes is sent to the complainant from the CCC admin address.

- *Note: If relevant parties are absent (e.g., during half-terms or sickness), an interim update must be sent detailing progress and an updated target completion date.*
- **Action by:** Investigating HoD / CCC Administrator

Step 8: Database Closure

The Investigating Officer returns all reports and final documentation to the CCC Administrator to be securely archived for future reference or potential appeals.

- **Action by:** Investigating HoD / CCC Administrator

6. Appeals

Step 9: Lodging an Appeal

If the complainant considers the matter unresolved after receiving the final response email, they may appeal via email to ccc.admin@accessmusic.ac.uk within **15 working days** of the response date. The appeal must explicitly state the reasons for the disagreement and provide new, supporting evidence.

- **Action by:** Complainant / CCC Administrator

Step 10: Appeals Panel Review

The Head of Compliance, alongside an appeals panel composed of members of the **Senior Leadership Team (SLT)**, will review the logged documentation. The panel will judge if the initial investigation was fair, thorough, and proportionate. This stage is a review of the process and will not involve a physical re-hearing or a meeting with the complainant unless the original investigation is found to be deficient.

- **Action by:** Head of Compliance & Senior Leadership Team

Step 11: Final Decision

The final, binding decision of the Appeals Panel will be issued to the complainant within **15 working days** of receiving the appeal. No further internal actions will be taken by the College after this stage.

- **Action by:** Appeals Panel / Head of Compliance

7. Information & Data Subject Access Requests (DSAR)

Step 12: Data Requests

Our DSAR / Information Request policy and forms are managed independently from the standard complaints process. Any formal DSAR or information request received by any staff member must be forwarded immediately to dataprotection@accessmusic.ac.uk.

- **Action by:** Receiving Staff Member / Data Protection Officer

8. Continuous Improvement & Reporting

Step 13: Monthly & Annual Reporting

The Head of Compliance will monitor all incoming feedback and active resolutions, maintaining a centralized log. Compliance will compile a **monthly report** for the Senior Leadership Team tracking volume and response metrics, alongside a comprehensive **annual report** analyzing complaint trends by cause, site, and protected characteristics (e.g., disability) to protect student outcomes.

- **Action by:** Head of Compliance

Step 14: Preventative Interventions & Quality Adjustments

Recommended improvements and corrective measures will be shared directly with local Centre Managers and relevant Heads of Department. These insights must be used to feed the annual self-assessment process and proactively adjust procedures (such as behavior management, Information Advice & Guidance (IAG), and communication) to prevent complaint recurrence.

- **Action by:** Head of Compliance / CCC Manager

Step 15: Compliments

All compliments received via email, letter, or verbal feedback must be forwarded to ccc.admin@accesstomusic.ac.uk. The CCC Administrator will log these and ensure they are shared with the relevant members of staff and their line managers to highlight best practices.

- **Action by:** All Staff / CCC Administrator

Learner/Parent/Guardian - Guide to Making a Complaint, Comment, or Compliment

At Access Further Education (AFE)—which includes **Access Creative College (ACC)**, **Access Sport College**, and **Access Industry**—your voice matters. If you are a learner, apprentice, parent, guardian, or employer, this guide explains how to share your feedback or get a problem sorted out quickly.

1. Try a Quick Local Fix First

Most problems can be solved right away by talking to the people who know you best.

- **Step 1:** Speak directly to your **tutors or assessors**.
- **Step 2:** If you still aren't happy, speak to your local **Head of Centre or Centre Manager**.

Our sites are expected to work hard to resolve things locally before a formal complaint is raised.

2. How to Make a Formal Complaint

If your issue cannot be resolved at your local site, or if it is a highly serious matter, you can launch a formal complaint.

Step 1: Submit Your Complaint

Send an email or call our central team.

-  **Email:** ccc.admin@accesstomusic.ac.uk
-  **Phone:** 0161 247 8088
-  **Important:** Please include your **mobile or telephone number** in your email. The person investigating your complaint may need to call you to gather more details.
- *Note: If you use AI tools to draft your complaint, or email a senior executive directly, it will still be routed into this same central system.*

Step 2: Acknowledgment (Within 5 Working Days)

Our Central Administrator will securely log your complaint and send you an email within 5 working days to let you know we have received it.

Step 3: Investigation (Within 15 Working Days)

Your complaint will be passed to the specific **Head of Department** who specializes in that area. For example:

- **Safeguarding or student behavior** goes to the Head of Safeguarding.
- **Bursary or financial issues** go to the Head of MIS.
- **Support issues** go to the Head of Learner Support.

The investigating manager will look at the evidence, talk to the people involved, and find a solution. Our **Head of Compliance** acts as an independent checker to make sure the decision is fair and matches college rules.

Step 4: Final Outcome

You will receive a full outcome email within **15 working days** explaining what we found and how the matter is being resolved. *(If an investigation is complex and needs more time—for example, if a key person is off sick—we will email you an update with a new deadline).*

3. What if I'm Still Not Happy? (The Appeals Process)

If you feel your complaint was not properly resolved by the Head of Department's final response, you have the right to appeal.

1. **How to Appeal:** Email ccc.admin@accesstomusic.ac.uk within **15 working days** of receiving your outcome. You must clearly state why you disagree with the decision and provide any new evidence you have.
2. **The Review:** The Head of Compliance and a panel of Senior Leaders will review all the paperwork. They will check if the investigation was fair and thorough. They will not hold a new meeting with you unless they find the original investigation was missing something important.
3. **Final Decision:** You will receive the panel's final, binding decision within **15 working days**.

 **Higher Education Students:** If you are studying a Higher Education course validated by **Nottingham Trent University (NTU)** and your complaint is still not resolved after following the steps above, you can escalate your complaint directly to NTU using their official procedures.