

Consumer Protection Law Self-Assessment 2022-23

Dudley College of Technology

UKPRN: 10007924

This document has been submitted as part of our registration with the Office for Students (OfS). It outlines the approach that Dudley College of Technology takes to consumer protection and the mechanisms we use to monitor and ensure compliance with relevant legislation.

Your overall approach to ensuring compliance with consumer protection law

The College offers diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate courses in collaboration with a range of UK universities. As an Alternative Provider of Higher Education in the UK, the College complies with the Consumer Rights Act (2015) and Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) requirements and carries out its statutory duties to protect the rights of students and all stakeholders who benefit from our service. Information made available to students when considering studying at the College is clear, allowing them to familiarise themselves with the terms and conditions before applying.

The College ensures that students are given comprehensive information about the educational opportunities on offer including course content, structure and duration, the location of study and the award given on successfully completing the course.

Detailed information provided to applicants includes:

- Entry requirements (both academic and non-academic); and an indication of the standard/typical offer level criteria;
- Core modules for the course and an indication of likely optional modules;
- Information about the composition of the course and how it will be delivered;
- Methods of assessment (for example, exams, coursework or practical assessments, or a combination of these)

We are compliant with consumer protection law as laid out by the Competition and Markets Authority guidance for Higher Education providers in that we make our policies and procedures available to the public; this includes our refund policy and complaints procedure. The following policies are all available on our website:

- [Assessment \(including Appeals Against Assessment\)](#)
- [Assessment for HE Programmes](#)
- [Assessment Malpractice and Maladministration for HE Courses](#)
- [College Charter](#)
- [How Are We Performing? \(Complaints /Compliments/Suggestions\)](#)
- [Equality & Diversity](#)
- [Fees Policy](#)
- [Gender Pay Gap Report](#)
- [Higher Education Admissions Policy](#)
- [Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement](#)
- [Plagiarism](#)
- [Safeguarding](#)
- [Student Code of Conduct](#)
- [Supply Chain \(Fees and Charges\)](#)

We believe the provision of this information, alongside our course fee information, fulfils our obligations under the [Consumer Rights Act 2015](#), which mandates us to enable students to make informed decisions about what and where to study; this Act replaces the [Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading regulations \(2008\)](#), [The Supply of Goods and Services Act \(1982\)](#) and the [Consumer Contracts \(information Cancellation and Additional Charges\) regulations \(2013\)](#). We also continually monitor the following websites to ensure we are compliant in issues relating to consumer protection law:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-guide-to-consumer-rights-for-students>
- <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en>
- <https://www.aoc.co.uk/>
- <http://www.oiahe.org.uk>

Prior to learners completing their enrolment we provide them with pre-contract information so that they understand the contractual obligations into which they are entering. Where learners are applying for Higher Education Loans we refer them to impartial advice from the [Gov.uk website](#).

A member of the Executive Leadership Team, the Chief Finance Officer is responsible for all legal matters, including any issues relating to consumer protection. The college's Senior Leadership Group (SLG) promptly review the learning agreement, used when enrolling learners onto a programme, and other consumer law matters as appropriate.

The college takes advice from our legal advisors on new contracts and when amending material clauses (such as GDPR) and terms and conditions. This year we will be

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incorporating more terms and conditions into the learning agreement, or into a side agreement provided to the learner alongside the learning agreement. This will ensure we remain compliant with the latest legislation and adopt best practice procedures. We have instructed our legal advisors to review the learning agreement and propose changes to it and provide a model contract and terms and conditions that we can follow or adopt. This advice and any subsequent approval by SLG will be completed prior to using the new or revised agreement to enrol learners on programmes for the 2022-23 academic year.

As part of our Quality and Standards team we have a designated member of staff who is responsible for monitoring the Complaints Process, which encompasses possible infringements under consumer law.

As part of our internal auditing procedure, all policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated. They are available to all staff via the college intranet and to students where relevant via Teams and the College's website.

We have a designated member of staff responsible for information management and data protection who is fully and regularly trained to work in this area.

Other college policies and procedures relating to consumer protection and information handling are referred to elsewhere in this review. The college provides training and updates to staff on a wide range of issues and legislation at CPD events undertaken across the year. One of the main training events is the college conference which sets aside a full day of training for all staff twice a year and covers matters relating to learners, curriculum, finance (including student finance) and professional services.

Your approach to providing information to applicants and students: research and application stage, offer stage and enrolment stage

Information regarding the higher education offer at Dudley College of Technology is communicated to prospective and existing students through the following channels:

- Website: <https://www.dudleycol.ac.uk/Higher-Education> (including course information, student support and finance guidance) and <https://www.blackcountryandmarchesiot.ac.uk/>
- Events, including Open days, Career Fairs, HE Fairs and Employer recruitment events
- School/Community engagement outreach work
- Social media, with a focus on various aspects of study
- Online advertising across a range of platforms and channels
- A face-to-face Information Advice and Guidance service open to all
- Support services, including Student Finance

- Promotion of Advanced Learner Loans, Higher Education Loans and Childcare support.

Material information is provided before learners make a decision about the course and information is given in writing, visually and verbally. All information is reviewed as part of the annual Business Planning Process, and Marketing is a recurring item at Higher Education team meetings.

We publicise our course offer, giving information on programme content and campus facilities, feedback from the Higher Education review, information on how to apply, student satisfaction data, destination data of previous learners, student finance, learner support, Student Union information and progression routes.

We ensure this is accurate and clear by regularly reviewing content and responding to student feedback via Learner Services, where requests for clarity and further information are collected and fed into the Marketing team. We can update information displayed on our website immediately, while course information linked to the Business Planner updates on a 24-hour cycle, allowing us to refresh information as required.

We deploy the LSTAT Widget on our website where the data threshold is appropriate.

All applicants for our Higher Education provision are invited to interview so an assessment can be made of their ability to study at the requisite level and their commitment to the intended programme of learning. Formal offer letters are issued from our central Admissions service; applications submitted through UCAS are processed via this channel.

Learners sign a Learner Agreement which forms the basis of the contractual relationship with us. We also draw attention to the important information at Induction and through the College Charter.

We have a college wide Access and Participation statement (<https://www.dudleycol.ac.uk/Higher-Education/Access-and-Participation-Statement>), and the review of our performance against this forms part of our Annual Strategic Impact Assessment which is published on the college website at <https://www.dudleycol.ac.uk/About-Us/Strategic-Impact-Assessment>

Your contract terms and conditions

Our terms and conditions, including rules and regulations, are made available to students at <https://www.dudleycol.ac.uk/Higher-Education/Student-Finance> and <https://www.dudleycol.ac.uk/About-Us/Policies-Procedures>. They are also accessible through the student internet and included in an Essentials Guide given to students at Induction, which is written in a more accessible format.

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Terms and conditions are held on the College website and, as with all policies, are subject to review and audit to ensure information is clear and accessible to all stakeholders. The college takes advice from our legal advisors on new contracts and when amending material clauses (such as GDPR) and terms and conditions, as outlined above.

Your complaint handling processes and practice

Complaints can be made by students, employers, members of staff, parents, visitors, local residents, related organisations or any other stakeholder, and can relate to all aspects of college business except employment; this is covered under Human Resources.

Complaints can be made through the following routes:

- Telephone
- E-mail
- Letter
- In person
- By completing our *How Are We Performing?* Form, which is available at all our campuses
- Through our college website: <https://www.dudleycol.ac.uk/About-Us/Policies-Procedures/Complaints-Compliments>
- Through our intranet: <http://intranet/Document-Store/Policies>

Our complaints process is easy to complete, gives complainants clear information regarding the process and how it will be handled, and is responsive to individual needs. It gives clear information about how the complaint will be processed, with specified time scales, and gives clear definition as to what constitutes a complaint. All complaints are recorded, and records are kept for 6 years.

If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant retains the right to pursue the matter further directly with the OIA. Before [bringing a complaint to the OIA](#), a complainant must complete the college's internal complaints or appeals procedures. If the complainant is not satisfied with the college's final decision and would like the OIA to review their complaint, they should complete an OIA Complaint Form and submit this, along with the Completion of Procedures letter. The OIA must receive the signed OIA Complaint Form within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter; otherwise they will consider the complaint to be out of time.

The complaints and appeals procedures are clear and accessible to students via handbooks and our virtual learning environment and are reinforced during induction. In addition, they are informed that they can raise issues informally with staff at any time. Learner Services provide advice and support for any students making a complaint or appeal within the College's processes.

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Staff at all levels are trained to deal with complaints and all complaints receive a response. Appropriate reasons are given for the decisions reached. No learner, member of staff or any other stakeholder is disadvantaged as a result of bringing a complaint. Dudley College of Technology is committed to the development of positive policies and procedures to promote equal opportunities for all people regardless of age, disability, gender (including gender reassignment), relationship status, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/belief or sexual orientation.

We review our complaints at the end of each term to ensure that we do not discriminate against any specific learner or staff group within the college, ensuring that:

- Decisions are consistent;
- Decisions are made at the appropriate level;
- Appropriate action is taken to address any identified issues;
- Any information is gathered to ensure that we improve the services we offer to all our stakeholders (both external and internal).

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator's good practice framework is used to support our handling of complaints relating to our higher education provision. We also have the following evidence that our complaints process is clear, accessible and fair:

- How are we performing? procedure (Compliments, Complaints and Suggestions);
- Complaints covered at staff and learner inductions;
- All complaints logged on Lists management system and management responsibility identified;
- Termly report to Standards Committee;
- Complaint analysis logged on the college Dashboard;
- Minutes of meetings where appropriate.

Students are made aware of how official complaints can be made during their initial induction session with the College. In addition, they are informed that they can raise issues informally with staff at any time. Learner Services and the Student Union provide advice and support for any students making a complaint or appeal within the College's processes.

We ensure that staff are competent in following these processes as this will ensure that we provide the best possible service and support to our college community. It will also help to ensure that we maintain our OFSTED 'outstanding' rating in line with our mission to provide "outstanding technical and professional learning, which raises aspirations, develops skills and changes lives" which meets the needs of all of our stakeholders.