



Stratford College London

Complaints Policy & Procedure

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Complaints Policy and Procedure

AIM

In order to facilitate and coordinate the reporting of concerns, grievances and dissatisfaction within the college environment, this complaints policy and procedure has been designed to guide the aggrieved and the concerned in matters which fall within the spectrum of operation of this college.

By this procedure, we hope to establish a sound mechanism according to which all complaints and concerns of those who have relations with this college may have access for redress.

This policy and procedure is formulated in three parts. In the event of a complainant not being satisfied at one particular stage he/she may request to proceed to the next stage. The complaints coordinator will facilitate all these processes.

PRINCIPLES

In order to ensure fairness, impartiality and effectiveness, the following principles shall be adhered to:

- Where possible we shall encourage informal means of resolution
- The procedure shall be accessible
- Shall be publicised within the college community
- Simple to understand by people of all educational levels
- Implemented and followed at the utmost impartial levels
- Resolution of concerns and complaints shall be swift within the established time-limit framework
- All stakeholders shall be kept informed of progress being made
- Where necessary a full investigation by an independent person may be carried out
- Respect for peoples' confidentiality
- All points at issue must be addressed
- An effective response and appropriate redress for all issues at stake.



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THE FORMAL PROCEDURE

Stage 1

Concerns may be raised at this initial stage of the process. Staff should do their utmost best at finding a resolution. Success at this stage is very important because it helps to reduce the number of complaints, which become protracted or move to the formal stages. Where the staff member receiving the complaint feels too compromised to handle the complaint, the coordinator must refer the complaint to another staff member. In addition, where the complainant feels uncomfortable to discuss their concern with a particular member of staff, this would be resolved by assigning that duty to another member of staff. The coordinator should record all the developments at this initial stage.

Where there are elements of criminality or complaint of a very serious nature the Director of Studies must be informed immediately on the same day. He would then take steps to appoint a Hearing Panel and inform the Academic Board, Social Services and/or the Police if necessary.

Stage 2

Where the complaint is not resolved or complainant is not satisfied with the development at stage one, the issue moves on to Stage 2 within 3 days. At this stage, the complaint goes to the Director of Studies for review and it must be in writing. The complaints form is available at the front desk and must be completed fully. The Director may if he so wishes delegate a staff member to conduct an investigation and report but that does not have any part to play in action to be taken. The person appointed in this case should have no personal interest in the matter, to ensure fairness. Where the complaint is about the Director himself, then it has to be handled by the Academic Board appointed Panel.

Stage 3

This is the Board's Appeal Panel Stage. Where a party is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 the matter moves on to this Stage within 3 days. The coordinator must facilitate these processes but a person appointed as clerk of the Panel should handle all Panel activities. He/she should be the centre for information and coordination of Panel activities, schedules and documentation.

The Panel should consist of **at least three people**. Only people who were not directly involved in previous consideration of the complaint are eligible to serve on this panel. One of the three members must be independent of the management and running of the college.

Complainant may choose to be accompanied by a person of their choice to the panel hearing if they so wish.



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Panel investigates and deliberates on the matter; makes findings and recommendations. The clerk of the Panel should ensure that the complainant, proprietor or Director of Studies and where appropriate, the relevant person complained about are given a copy of the findings and recommendations.

The chair of the Panel (who is appointed by the members) should drive this stage, facilitating the process and giving fair hearing to all parties.

PANEL DECISION

Chair of Panel would notify the complainant, the person complained about and the Director of Studies or proprietor, of Panel decision in writing, explaining if there are any rights of appeal and if so where the appeal should be lodged. This concludes the formal stage. The Panel will write to the student setting out the outcome of the formal stage including any decision to reject the complaint and the reasons for each decision in clear language.

Information to the student must indicate:

- the student's right to take the complaint to the review stage
- the grounds on which he or she can do so
- the time limit for escalating to the review stage
- the appropriate procedure
- and where and how to access support.

If the complaint has been rejected, for example because it has been submitted late, the College will issue a Completion of Procedures letter and inform the student that this is not the end of the procedure and that there is opportunity to apply to move onto a Review Stage within **5 working days** of the issue of the completion of procedure letter.

Where a complaint is upheld, the College will explain how and when it will implement any remedy, whether that includes an apology, and what the student can do if he or she remains dissatisfied.

Review of formal complaint

If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal stage, he or she can request a review within 5 working days upon communication of outcomes of the formal stage.

The College will specify the grounds on which a student can request a review. A request for a review may be on limited grounds, including but not confined to:

- a review of the procedures followed at the formal stage
- a consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable
- new material evidence which the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process.

The review stage will not usually consider the issues afresh or involve a further investigation.

A complaint must have been considered at the formal stage before it can be escalated to the review stage.

The College will allocate the request for review to a designated member of staff not involved at any previous stage. It is important to be clear from the start of the review stage exactly what is being

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reviewed, and to ensure that both the reviewer and the student understand the purpose and scope of the review. If the student's expectations appear to exceed the scope of the review stage, the provider should explain this to the student as soon as possible in writing in order to manage expectations about possible outcomes.

Key questions to consider could include:

- Were the relevant procedures followed during the formal stage?
- Was the outcome reasonable in all the circumstances?
- Has the student received clear reasons why the complaint was rejected at the formal stage?
- If new material evidence has been provided, has the student given valid reasons for not supplying this earlier

Closing the complaint at the review stage

If the complaint is not upheld the outcome of the review stage should be communicated to the student in writing by issuing a Completion of Procedures letter as soon as possible and within 28 days. This should include a clear explanation and outline the reasons for the decision in straightforward language. This will help the student decide whether or not to pursue the matter further

CONFIDENTIALITY

All records and correspondence relating to an individual would be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 163 of the Education Act (2002) requests access for them.

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR (OIA)

Independent external review (OIA)

Once the review stage has been completed, the student is entitled to ask the OIA, the independent ombudsman service, to review his or her complaint about the outcome of the provider's complaints process. The complaint should be submitted to the OIA within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.

This is the case where a student has exhausted the internal college complaints mechanisms and still feels that the outcomes are not satisfactory, there is opportunity to submit a formal complaint to the OIA. College will guide students on how to make use of the OIA. Further information on the OIA can be accessed at: (<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/online-complaint-form.aspx>)

Their role is to review individual complaints by students against higher education providers. The OIA has no regulatory powers over providers and cannot punish or fine them.



Stratford College London COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Flowchart Summary of Dealing with complaints

