

The London Interdisciplinary School

Student Complaints Procedure

Introduction

This Procedure describes how students may make a complaint to the School, and how the School may investigate and act upon complaints.

Principles

The School's Student Complaints Procedure has been developed in line with The Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) *Good Practice Framework: Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals*, and is underpinned by the OIA's principles of accessibility, clarity, fairness, proportionality, independence, confidentiality, timeliness, and improving the student experience. These principles also underpin our Academic Appeals Procedure, which is separate and distinct. A student raising an issue can seek guidance from their personal tutor, the Student Experience Department, or the Head of Quality as to whether it falls into the Complaints or Academic Appeals category.

The School regards complaints as important aspect of student feedback. The School will ensure that no student suffers any disadvantage as a consequence of making a genuine complaint.

Where possible, the School will assist students to resolve any complaint informally before invoking formal procedures.

There is a separate Complaints and Appeals Procedure for Applicants.

Scope

The Student Complaints Procedure may apply to the following issues:

- The delivery or administration of the programme which the student is registered (e.g., quality of teaching);
- The conduct of a member of staff (e.g., discrimination);
- The conduct of a fellow student;
- An act or omission concerning the administration or operation of a procedure or service provided by the School;
- Any other matter concerning the operation of the School that adversely and unfairly affects the student, and which is under the School's control.

The Student Complaints Procedure does not apply to:

- Appeals against School admissions decisions or complaints about the School's admissions process (dealt with under the Applicant Complaints and Appeals Procedure);

- Appeals against decisions by the Board of Examiners (dealt with under the Academic Appeals Procedure);
- Allegations of cheating (dealt with under the Academic Malpractice Policy);
- Student attendance or disciplinary issues raised by the School (dealt with under the Student Conduct Policy and Disciplinary Procedure).

Procedure

The School's Student Complaints Procedure follows an escalating three-stage approach: (1) Opportunity for early resolution at a local level; (2) Formal complaint and determination; (3) Appeal against formal determination.

(1) Early resolution at a local level

The School will encourage students to resolve their complaints quickly and informally and at the local level.

In the first instance, the student should raise their complaint informally with the person concerned. If this is not possible or is not appropriate, the student should raise their complaint informally with their personal tutor, the Student Experience Department, the relevant module leader, or the Learning Director (depending on the nature of the complaint). The recipient of an informal complaint may refer it to a more appropriate staff member, with the student's consent.

The recipient of the complaint will seek to resolve the complaint quickly and informally, normally within 15 working days of the complaint being made. In doing so, they may liaise with other appropriate members of staff.

Where the complaint is against a staff member or another student, the staff member or student concerned will be informed of the complaint against them and given the opportunity to respond.

Resolutions at the informal level may include offering more information or explanation, listening and apologising, or the suggesting solutions.

Where the nature of the complaint is sufficiently serious, the student may be justified in making a formal complaint without first attempting to resolve the complaint informally. If the student is not satisfied that their complaint has been resolved at the informal level, they may raise a formal complaint.

(2) Formal complaint and determination

Making a formal complaint

A formal complaint should be made as soon as possible after informal attempts to resolve the issue have been exhausted, and must be made within 25 working days of the occurrence of the subject of the complaint. A complaint may be considered beyond this deadline if the student can demonstrate good, evidenced reasons for not

making it within the specified timeline. Where a student has missed the deadline for making a formal complaint, they must write (by letter or email) to the Head of Quality, setting out the reasons for the delay, supported by objective, authoritative evidence (e.g., a medical letter).

A student may be asked to raise a formal complaint where there is a possibility of disciplinary action against a staff member or fellow student.

A formal complaint must be made by the student in writing (by email or letter) to the Head of Quality, setting out:

- The nature of the complaint;
- What, if any, informal attempts have been made to resolve the complaint;
- Any supporting evidence or documentation;
- The remedy sought.

The Head of Quality will send an acknowledgment of receipt to the student within five working days of receiving the formal complaint.

Formal investigation

The Head of Quality or their nominee will investigate the formal complaint. They should have no material interest in the outcome of the complaint. The investigation may include contacting the student for further information or clarification; in some cases the Head of Quality or their nominee will submit the complaint to another independent staff member for a second opinion. Where the subject of the complaint is a student or staff member, the subject will be notified of the complaint and given an opportunity to respond.

The Head of Quality or their nominee will notify the complainant in writing with their conclusions within 25 working days. These conclusions may be:

- Complaint is fully upheld and a remedy determined; *or*
- Complaint is partially upheld, with an explanation of the parts which are dismissed, and a remedy determined; *or*
- Complaint is dismissed, with an explanation of the reasons.

Where the student is satisfied with the Head of Quality's response, the complaint is deemed to have been resolved. The Head of Quality or their nominee will be communicate any actions arising from the complaint to the relevant School Department and will record the actions taken.

Where a student complains of a disciplinary offence committed by another student, and the School decides to initiate its Student Disciplinary Procedure against the accused student, this will normally be deemed a resolution of the complaint.

(3) Appeal against formal determination

Where a student is dissatisfied with the formal determination of their complaint by the Head of Quality or their nominee, they may appeal to the School's Chief Executive for

review. Appeals to the Chief Executive will only be considered where: (a) there were procedural irregularities in the investigation of the formal complaint; or (b) new evidence is presented which could not reasonably be have made available during formal investigation. A student appealing to the Chief Executive must specify the grounds on which the complaint should be reviewed (i.e., either (a) or (b)), and the remedy sought. Where an appeal fails to satisfy either condition (a) or (b), or where it fails to specify the grounds of appeal, it will be dismissed, and the Head of Quality will issue the student with a Completion of Procedures letter.

The student must submit their appeal in writing (by email or letter) to the Chief Executive within 10 working days of the notification of the outcome of the formal investigation. Where the student is unable to submit their appeal within this timeframe, they must write to the Chief Executive with good, evidenced reasons for their failure to do so. In such cases the Chief Executive may consider the late appeal.

The Chief Executive or their nominee will review how the formal complaint was investigated and will review the decision reached. The Chief Executive or nominee will notify the student in writing of the outcome of their appeal within 25 working days of receiving it. The outcome may be:

- To confirm the outcome of the formal complaint. Where this is the case, there School's internal mechanisms for appeal will have been exhausted, and the Head of Quality will issue the student with a Completion of Procedures letter.
- Or*
- To revise the decision on the complaint; *or*
- To order a new investigation.

Where the student has exhausted the School's internal procedures and remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). Applications to the OIA must be made within 12 months of the Completion of Procedures letter.

Frivolous or Vexatious Complaints

Where a student submits a complaint that is, in the view of the School, without substance or merit, or is otherwise unreasonable, the School may dismiss the complaint as frivolous or vexatious. The OIA sets out that frivolous or vexatious complaint may be characterised by the following:

- Complaints which are harassing and repetitive;
- Complaints which are pursued in an unreasonable manner (even where the complaint has merit);
- Demands for remedies which are unrealistic or unreasonable or lack serious purpose or value.

The Chief Executive or their nominee will review formal complaints that the Head of Quality has identified as frivolous or vexatious, and will make a determination on them in writing within ten working days. This determination will either be that the complaint should not be considered frivolous or vexatious, and should be considered under the

formal Student Complaints Procedure, or that the complaint is frivolous and vexatious, and should be dismissed.

Where a complaint is dismissed by the Chief Executive or their nominee for being frivolous or vexatious, the student will be notified with reasons.

Students who submit frivolous or vexatious complaints may be subject to disciplinary procedures; the Chief Executive will determine whether this is appropriate.

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