



ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE LONDON

St Patrick's College

Complaints Policy & Procedure

1. Purpose and Scope

St Patrick's College seeks to continually improve the quality of its services and strives to meet customer expectations. We are committed to providing our students with a high quality educational experience, supported by excellent academic, administrative and pastoral support services.

Whilst much of the feedback received is positive, it is recognised that at times problems arise. Any person coming into contact with the College who is dissatisfied with their experience can therefore express concern or raise a complaint.

The student Complaints Procedure is designed to help students to take up problems or complaints and to obtain a speedy response from the College in helping to resolve the complaint.

If students make a complaint to the Police or take any other legal action at the same time as their internal complaint, then no investigation by the College using this procedure will be undertaken at this stage.

2. General Principles

Students or other relevant parties are encouraged to raise a concern or complaint as soon as possible after the event has taken place, in order that the matter can be investigated thoroughly and addressed in a timely manner.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint is strongly encouraged to do so personally. A complaint received from a third party will be considered only with the express written permission of the person to whom the complaint relates.

In order to ensure that a thorough investigation of a complaint is made, the College expects to be able to collect appropriate information from all the parties involved. Where a complaint is made anonymously this is not possible and therefore, no action will normally be taken in the event of an anonymous complaint being raised.

A complainant is always invited to discuss the complaint, or attend a meeting to establish further details regarding the cause of dissatisfaction or explore the solution being sought. At any meetings held as part of the investigation or procedure the complainant will have the right to be accompanied by one person (for example a friend, relative or Students' Council representative), who also has the right to speak on behalf of the complainant. However, this person is in addition to the complainant, not a substitute. The complainant must also be present, unless there is a good reason why this is not possible. Other parties involved in the complaint, including a member of staff who has been the subject of a complaint, will similarly have the right to be accompanied in any meetings, normally by a trade union representative or nominated colleague.

A group of students may use this procedure to make a collective complaint, but the group must nominate one person to be the main contact for purposes of communication and the spokesperson for the group, representing the group in all matters relating to the complaint.

All information received as a result of a complaint investigation will remain confidential to those involved in the process. However, it should be noted that, all parties involved in the complaint have the right to know the full details of the complaint, including its source.

Appropriate staff will be appointed to investigate complaints raised; this would generally be the Registrar but could be another appropriate member of the Complaints Committee (CC) or a senior manager. Anyone with a personal interest in the complaint will neither investigate nor adjudicate.

Students will not be disadvantaged as a result of raising a matter of concern or of making a complaint, provided it is made in good faith. However, if a complaint is shown to be malicious or vindictive, the complaint shall be disregarded and disciplinary / legal action may be taken against the individual who submitted the initial complaint

3. Advice for Potential Complainants

All formal complaints should be made in writing; but please refer to the process below for further advice.

When submitting a complaint, be brief and to the point, and avoid vague allegations. Where possible, substantiate the complaint by referring to specific events, and provide documentary evidence. Be clear and realistic about what desired outcomes or actions you are expecting.

Potential complainants may want to obtain advice regarding the procedure prior to submitting a complaint. Informal advice can be sought from the Registrar or the Students Council. Advice may be obtained in person, by telephone or email. The Students Council will offer additional support and accompany complainants to meetings if desired.

4. Complaints Procedure

The College has developed a staged approach to making a complaint which can be escalated if the complainant does not feel the matter is resolved after the previous stage. These stages must generally be followed in order, and a complaint cannot be taken to a higher level until the lower level is exhausted. If a complaint is sent directly to the Principal's office, it will be re-directed to the Higher Education Directorate to appoint an appropriate member of staff to investigate and action.

Stage 1 - Informal Complaint

The College expects that the majority of complaints can be resolved at an early stage through informal discussion without needing to instigate formal procedures. Therefore if an issue arises the first step is to bring the matter to the attention of the relevant staff, either by email or verbally, and discuss it with them.

The first, and most commonly used option is to resolve the concern informally by speaking directly with the appropriate individual. This may be the Registrar, the Director of SAS, the Academic Lead or the Dean of School. Students and staff members electing to follow the informal route should still fill out a Complaints Form and 'tick' the Informal box.

Recipients of informal student complaints are responsible for addressing them promptly and fairly. In all these cases the person receiving the issue or complaint should seek to discover the nature of the problem and if possible resolve it there and then. If an immediate solution cannot be found and further investigation is required, the recipient will normally let the student know within seven working days of receiving the initial complaint what steps (if any) will be taken to address the complaint and the expected timescale.

All informal complaints will be recorded on the complaints spreadsheet for monitoring and quality improvement purposes and submitted immediately to the Complaints Secretary (CS), who will forward it onto the appropriate Head of Department and the Complaints Committee.

Stage 2 - Formal Complaint

If after receiving a response to a Stage 1 complaint, a complainant is not satisfied and wishes to take the complaint further they should submit a complaint in writing to the Registrar.

A formal Stage 2 complaint should be submitted as soon as possible after receiving a response to the informal complaint. The greater the time delay, the more difficult it will be for the complaint to be thoroughly investigated.

A complainant should submit their complaint by means of a Complaint Form and submit it to the Complaints Secretary outlining the nature of the complaint, what has been done to try and resolve the situation and what their desired outcome is. Complaints submitted by letter or email (i.e. not on the complaints form) will be accepted provided they include all the elements covered within the form.

The Complaints Secretary will acknowledge receipt of the now formal complaint within seven working days, giving an indication of the likely timescale for a full response to be given. At the same time the Complaints Committee will be notified that the complaint has been received in order that it can be logged & reported.

The Registrar usually An Investigating Officer (IO) will be appointed, normally this would be the Registrar or another Complaints Committee member. The IO may telephone or meet with the complainant to discuss the complaint and/or seek more details. This provides the complainant with the opportunity to present their case and express their concerns. Where a meeting is held, students may be accompanied by one other person (as set out in paragraph 2), who may participate in the proceedings. The IO will then investigate the complaint, speaking to concerned parties.

The complainant will receive a full written response to their complaint after the CC decision within 4 weeks, providing there are no undue delays, for example in obtaining further evidence from the complainant or others involved in the complaint. On very rare occasions where this is not possible, for example because a complaint is particularly complex, the IO will contact the complainant at least every 4 weeks to update them on the progress. The response will detail the findings of any investigation carried out, indicate the outcome, and whether the complaint is upheld, reasons for the outcome, and explain the proceedings under which the complainant can, if desired, take the complaint further through Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure.

Stage 3 – Complaints Panel

If following the outcome of the formal Stage 2 complaint the complainant is still not satisfied, it may be possible to move to Stage 3 and request that a complaints panel be convened.

Again a Stage 3 complaint should be submitted as soon as possible after receiving a response to the Stage 2 complaint; if it extends beyond the academic year in which they received the response to the initial complaint it will not be accepted, unless there is good reason why it could not have been submitted sooner.

A Stage 3 complaint can only be made if the complainant can demonstrate significant grounds for dissatisfaction with the response, specifically on the basis that there is new evidence for consideration, or that there has been a procedural irregularity in the investigation of the complaint. In this situation, where a student wishes to pursue the complaint to Stage 3, they need to make a request in writing and submit it to the Complaints Secretary.

An appeal panel of three senior members of staff, chaired by the Director of SAS, will be arranged to review the complaint. The complainant must attend this panel, the other parties

will also be present, and all may be accompanied by another person (as detailed in paragraph 2). The Director of SAS will inform the complainant of the outcome within 4-6 weeks.

It should be noted that non-attendance at the Panel meeting constitutes acceptance of Stage 2 findings

Stage 4 – Refer to Partner OiA

If a complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome of this decision the matter can be referred to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OiA) for Higher Education, provided that your complaint is eligible under its rules. The OiA has been established to provide an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. Students will need to refer their complaint to the OiA along with appropriate documentation within three months of the final decision. Further details can be obtained from your University or via the OiA website www.oiahe.org.uk

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you make a complaint to the Police or take any other legal action at the same time you use this procedure, then no investigation by the College using the complaint procedure will be undertaken at this stage.

This policy and the effectiveness of these procedures will be reviewed on a regular basis and updated if necessary.

Complaints Procedure

