



## **Cliff College: Student Complaint Procedure**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 As part of its commitment to ensuring the standard and quality of its programmes of study, services, and facilities, the College has established this Procedure to deal with complaints from students. Complaints provide useful feedback information and, where appropriate, will be used to improve services and facilities.

1.2 This Procedure is available for students registered for all validated programmes of study at the College, whether undergraduate or postgraduate. For the purposes of this Procedure, the term “student” will also include those who have recently been registered as a student at the College. Cliff College (hereafter, ‘the College’) requires that every student maintains, at all times, and in all places, an acceptable standard of conduct, and that every student complies with regulations made or implemented by the College.

1.3 The Procedure comprises several stages, both informal and formal. Students who have a complaint to make should raise it directly with the staff concerned at the earliest opportunity, as matters that are dealt with informally at an early stage have the best chance of being resolved effectively. Only where the informal procedures have been completed and the complainant remains dissatisfied should the formal stage be instituted. It is recognised, however, that there may be occasions where an informal approach is not appropriate and the student may wish to proceed directly to a later stage in the procedure, giving reasons for doing so. In such situations, the recipient of the complaint should decide at which stage in the procedure the complaint should most appropriately be considered, taking account of its particular nature and circumstances. In respect of particularly serious complaints, the student may write directly to the Vice Principal Academic without having followed the informal and formal stages of this procedure set out below. In such cases, the Vice Principal Academic will decide whether to refer the complaint for consideration by a Complaints Panel or whether it should more appropriately be referred to an earlier stage in the procedure.

1.4 Complaints should be made as soon as possible, and in any case within eight weeks of the events or actions (or lack of actions) which have prompted the complaint. The College will not normally consider complaints made after this period, unless there is good reason for the delay.

1.5 Every reasonable effort will be made to deal promptly and efficiently with all complaints, to investigate them thoroughly and objectively and to seek to resolve them satisfactorily. Complaints will be dealt with positively and constructively. If a complaint is upheld, the College will seek to provide an appropriate response and will correct any mistakes or

misunderstandings and will take any other action as appropriate. If a complaint is not upheld then reasons for that decision will be given.

1.6 All complaints will be dealt with in confidence with the proviso that enquiries will have to be made to investigate the matters that are the subject of the complaint. Also, an individual against whom a complaint is made has the right to be supplied with a copy of the complaint and to comment on it. If this presents a problem for a student who wishes their complaint to be given complete confidentiality, he or she is advised to discuss how the complaint might be addressed with an appropriate officer of the College.

1.7 The effectiveness of any complaint procedure depends on the College being able to collect appropriate information from the parties involved in order to investigate the matter properly. For this reason, anonymous complaints will not be dealt with under this Procedure. It is at the discretion of the member of staff receiving an anonymous complaint to determine how the matter is handled.

1.8 The College will treat all complaints seriously and will deal with them without recrimination. Where, however, a complaint is shown to be frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice, disciplinary action may be taken against the complainant.

1.9 The time limits set out in this Procedure will normally be followed. However, where, for good reason, this is not possible, the complainant will be kept informed of progress.

1.10 Students seeking help in using this procedure, or if they are uncertain as to whom their complaint should be referred, should seek advice from any of the following:

1.10.1 the Academic Registrar

1.10.2 the appropriate Programme Lead

1.10.3 the Vice Principal Academic/Academic Delivery Director

## **2. Definition and Scope of the Procedure**

2.1 The College defines a complaint as 'an expression of dissatisfaction which merits a response'.

2.2 The Procedure is designed for complaints in respect of the student's experience at the College related to:

2.2.1 the provision of programmes, or parts of programmes of study, services or facilities by the College

2.2.2 the actions or lack of actions by the College or its staff

2.3 The Complaints Procedure does not cover appeals relating to examinations or assessments, or to academic progress, or against expulsion or exclusion on academic grounds.

2.4 This Student Complaints Procedure can be used by students for either individual or collective complaints. It is expected that the student(s) concerned will pursue the complaint personally; complaints submitted by a third party will not be accepted unless accompanied by written authorisation from the student(s). Complaints by a group of students are often of a general nature where it is usually more appropriate for the students to raise the matter with a student representative in the first instance. Complaints may then be made by the

group of students if the relevant representation system has not achieved a satisfactory outcome, or if this is not thought to be an appropriate route.

### **3. Informal Stage – Local Resolution**

3.1 Most complaints can be resolved informally and, where practicable, a complaint should be dealt with as close as possible to the point at which it arises. The complaint should therefore be made initially to the appropriate member of staff who seems best placed to deal with the matter (e.g. Academic Registrar, Programme Lead, Community Warden). A student should normally expect to receive a written or verbal acknowledgement within five working days and a full response within fifteen working days of receipt of the complaint.

### **4. Formal Procedure**

4.1 If the student is not satisfied with the response at the informal stage, he/she may initiate a formal complaint by writing to the Vice Principal Academic. The information required is as follows:

- 4.1.1 details of the complaint
- 4.1.2 a statement of the steps already taken to try to resolve the complaint informally and why the response has not been considered to be satisfactory
- 4.1.3 the form of resolution or redress sought

The Vice Principal Academic will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days and will determine whether the complaint should be dealt with by their self, or more appropriately be investigated by the Principal. In the event that the complaint is referred to another, the student will be informed accordingly.

4.2 The person dealing with the formal complaint (hereafter referred to as the 'Investigator'), who must be independent of the source of the complaint, will undertake an investigation into the substance of the complaint using whatever means they feel appropriate. If a meeting with the student takes place, the student may be accompanied by a fellow student or a member of staff. The Investigator will attempt resolution of the complaint by a means appropriate to its nature and circumstances. Such means may include:

- 4.2.1 correspondence between the parties
- 4.2.2 negotiation with the student or with appropriate members of staff or with both;
- 4.2.3 facilitation of a conciliation meeting between the student and the members of staff concerned
- 4.2.4 or, if both parties agree, referral for mediation

4.3 It is expected that the formal procedure should normally be completed and a written response sent to the student within twenty working days of receipt of the completed complaint. The possible outcomes at this stage include:

- 4.3.1 a resolution, or following mediation if appropriate
- 4.3.2. provision to the student of information in explanation of the circumstances which led to the complaint
- 4.3.3. referral of the matter to a Complaints Panel if the complaint raises serious or complex matters which require further investigation and enquiry
- 4.3.4 dismissal of the complaint as being without foundation, with reasons given

to the student in writing

4.4 If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the formal complaint and believes that his or her complaint has not been handled properly or fairly according to these procedures, the student may request a Review (see section 5).

## **5. Review**

5.1 If, once a final decision on the complaint has been given, the student believes that the complaint has not been handled fairly or properly in accordance with these procedures, the student may request a review by writing to the Principal within ten working days of receipt of the formal response. The request should include details of why the student remains dissatisfied and what resolution the student is seeking, and should include copies of correspondence exchanged during the preceding stages, and any other relevant papers.

5.2 Receipt of the request for Review will be acknowledged in writing within five working days. The Principal, or his or her delegated nominee, (hereafter called 'the Reviewer') will then review the case on the basis of the documentation provided by the student and that made available by the person or panel who dealt with the formal complaint. The Reviewer may decide to seek further information from the student and/or from others concerned. Taking account of the substance of the complaint and the previous attempts at resolution, the Reviewer will then decide on an appropriate course of action, which may include:

5.2.1 specific action to resolve the matter

5.2.2 referral to the Complaints Panel or to a new Complaints Panel

5.2.3 dismissal of the complaint as being without foundation, in which case reasons will be given to the student in writing.

The student should be notified of the Reviewer's decision within twenty working days of receipt of the request for Review.

5.3 If the Reviewer dismisses the complaint as being without foundation, there will be no further opportunity for the complaint to be pursued within the College.

## **6. Complaints Panel**

6.1 A complaint may be referred to a Complaints Panel by the person dealing with the formal complaint (as set out in 4.3), or by the Reviewer (as set out in 5.2) or by the Vice Principal Academic (as explained in 1.3).

6.2 Where the matter is referred to a Complaints Panel, the Panel should normally convene to hear the complaint within twenty working days of the referral. All members chosen to serve on the Panel will be independent of the source of the complaint. The Complaints Panel will consist of:

6.2.1 Principal (in the Chair)

6.2.2 Vice Principal Academic

6.2.3 One member of academic staff who is not the respective Programme Lead

6.2.4 The Student President

6.3 The student will be entitled to attend the meeting and to be accompanied by a fellow student or a member of staff. The area of College that is the subject of the complaint may be represented by one member of staff. If the complaint relates to the actions of an

individual member of staff, that individual has the right to be informed of the substance of the complaint and to attend and be accompanied by a fellow member of staff or other representative.

6.4 The Complaints Panel will consider both the substance of the complaint and also the way in which the complaint was handled in the earlier stages of the procedure.

6.5 The outcomes of the Complaints Panel may include:

6.5.1 if the complaint is upheld:

6.5.1.1 recommendations to the Principal

6.5.1.2 recommendations to College committees in respect of relevant quality assurance issues or other procedures or policies

6.5.1.3 appropriate redress to the student which may include payment of compensation and reasonable expenses

6.5.2 if the complaint is not upheld, the student will be informed in writing with reasons for its dismissal

6.6 The conclusions and recommendations of the Complaints Panel, with reasons, should be notified in writing to the student and other involved parties within five working days of the meeting. If there is a delay in reaching a conclusion because of, for example, the need for clarification of matters with either party or for further information, all parties will be kept informed of progress and explanations will be given.

## **7. Conclusion of the Student Complaint Procedure**

7.1 There are no other appeals procedures within the College beyond those detailed above.

7.2 However, in exceptional circumstances, a student may be able to appeal the outcome to the University of Manchester. The grounds and procedure for such an appeal are found in [Schedule 5](#) of the University's policy on academic appeals and complaints.

7.3 Students who believe that their case has not been dealt with properly by the College, or that the outcome is unreasonable, may be able to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) if the complaint is eligible under its rules, and once all internal procedures have been concluded.

[*Note:* information about the role of the OIA and the procedure for submitting complaints can be obtained from the OIA website: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).]

## **8. Annual Report**

8.1 Each year, in September, the Vice Principal Academic will prepare a report for the Senior Management Group on the number and nature of complaints, identifying any general issues that may have arisen.

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Lead Contact:	a.stobart@cliffcollege.ac.uk