



Informal Dispute Resolution for Complaints of Harassment between Students

Why does the College have an informal system?

The College has a preference that - wherever possible – harassment complaints against students are resolved at an early stage without the need for formal proceedings. We believe harassment complaints often arise because of misunderstandings or impulsive actions. We would prefer that people had an opportunity to explore any possible misunderstandings, to apologise when appropriate and to consider acting differently in similar situations in the future in a more relaxed setting than that of a formal disciplinary procedure.

Do I have to agree to involve myself in the informal process?

No. The process is voluntary, so you can decline to be involved. In that case a formal process will normally be initiated.

What do I have to gain from agreeing to an informal process?

If a dispute is resolved informally:

- There will be no sanction. A student could face a formal reprimand, a fine, or even an interruption of studies under the formal procedure.
- There will be nothing noted on your College record. A student who is formally sanctioned can have the outcome noted on their record.
- There is greater confidentiality. Although we seek to keep formal hearings as private as possible, the process can involve other College departments and witnesses and possibly your academic department will become aware of the proceedings. In an informal hearing the process is usually restricted to the complainant(s), the student complained about and two members of the Support and Advisory Services. The record of the outcome also remains in the Support and Advisory Services

What is the likely outcome?

It is possible that after an explanation of the matter the issue could be resolved with no further action. However, often it needs the student to offer something – an apology, an agreement to moderate behaviour, possibly even an agreement to seek some personal help or to follow advice before the complainant is happy to end proceedings.

If I agree to take part in informal proceedings, am I not in fact admitting I was in the wrong?

No. The process is “without prejudice”. We will see if there is room for resolution of the issue. If a resolution is agreed, the matter is closed. If not, nothing is lost. The case remains unresolved. Nothing is considered proved against the students. It is then up to the complainant or the College to consider formal proceedings.

What is to stop the complainant taking the informal result – such as an apology – and using it as an admission of guilt and as a basis to pursue a formal claim under the College processes?

The procedure expressly guarantees this cannot happen.

If it cannot be resolved informally and has to go to a formal hearing, might not the Student Discipline Officer have already made up his/her mind against me on the facts s/he has heard?



No. The College process specifically guarantees that a student is entitled to have a different officer hear the case if it becomes formal after an attempt at informal resolution.

Can all student discipline matters be dealt with informally?

No. This process only applies to allegations of harassment of moderate severity. In areas other than harassment, the College is not under any obligation to consider informal proceedings, although in line with our first statement and according to the issue, we may try to avoid formal proceedings in other cases if we judge it appropriate.

Further information

Information about harassment

www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/welfare/wellbeing/studentharassment.aspx

Code of Practice on Personal Harassment for Students:

www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/documents/pdf/codesandregulations/studentharassment.pdf

College Disciplinary Regulations:

www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/documents/pdf/studentdisciplinaryregulationsnewbrand2014.pdf

Student Handbook

www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/onlinestudenthandbook.aspx

Students wishing for guidance in this area are advised to speak to:

Community, Wellbeing & Student Outreach, Support & Advisory Services

Founder's West, 1st floor

E: wellbeing@royalholloway.ac.uk

T: 01784 443394

Advice & Support Centre, Students' Union

SU Building, 1st floor

E: advice@su.rhul.ac.uk

T: 01784 276700