Student Complaints Procedure

Approved by: Council
Date: 26 June 2013
To be reviewed before: August 2015
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Complaints Procedure (continued)

Introduction

1. Royal Holloway hopes and expects that students will be satisfied with their experience at the College, and is always pleased to hear about particularly good aspects of students’ experiences, but it also recognises that there may be circumstances when students may not be satisfied. The following procedures are intended to deal with circumstances in which, as a result of a student’s experience at Royal Holloway, s/he has a complaint about the College’s provision of services or facilities.

2. There are many ways in which comments or suggestions about particular aspects of College life may be made. All undergraduate students have Personal Advisers or tutors who may be able to help with problems. Postgraduate students can seek help or advice from their advisor or Director of Graduate Studies. All academic departments have Student Staff Committees, which are intended to provide a general means of communicating and resolving difficulties. There are systems in all departments for feedback surveys on teaching and administrative and other support services. Most problems will be resolved by these mechanisms. This procedure is intended to deal with complaints that cannot be resolved through these mechanisms or when a more formal procedure is appropriate.

3. These procedures are not contractual but are intended to be a statement of the College's commitment to operating fair procedures for investigating and responding to students' complaints. These procedures therefore may be adapted at the College's discretion to meet the needs of a particular complaint. The College will also keep these procedures under review and will amend them from time to time if necessary.

Glossary

4. The table below explains the key terms used in these Student Complaints Procedures.

| Completion of procedures letter | A letter which confirms that the college’s procedures have been completed. It summarises the decisions and the reasons for it, and advises the student that they may apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for a review. |
| Investigating Officer | The member of staff who has been asked |
**Complaints Procedure (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>to investigate and consider matters and allegations included in a complaint. On receipt of a complaint the Deputy College Secretary will ask an appropriate member of staff to take on this role. The person will not have been involved in any informal discussions about the complaint, and will be as close to the source of complaint as possible, i.e. the Head of the relevant Department.</th>
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</table>

**Scope of the Complaints Procedure**

5. A complaint can arise if a student or a group of students has / have a specific concern about the provision of a programme of study or related academic service, or about non-academic matters or services. This complaints procedure applies to matters which are not covered by other established systems or procedures, for example, students whose registration has been terminated because of unsatisfactory academic performance should refer to the Academic Appeals Procedure (see Appendix 1 for appropriate alternate routes).

6. It is expected that many complaints will be resolved informally, amicably, quickly and to the satisfaction of the complainant. Students who have a complaint about an academic matter are expected to try to resolve it informally with their Academic Co-ordinator, Head of Department, Associate Dean or other appropriate member of staff before submitting a formal complaint described in these procedures. If in doubt about whom to approach, students should seek advice from their Personal Adviser. Students who have a complaint about an administrative matter or service are advised to try to resolve it informally with a suitable member of that office or service.

7. The College recognises that complaints may include a number of matters and that situations can become complex. If received complaints contain allegations or concerns that require consideration using other processes the student will be informed in writing and the complaint suspended until the resolution of other matters as appropriate. Likewise, other processes may be suspended whilst a complaint is investigated. Students will be kept informed at all times.
8. Students who are not sure how to express their complaint or need advice should contact either the Welfare Office at the Student’s Union or the College Secretary’s Office.

General Principles

9. These procedures have been developed to ensure that complaints made, either individually or collectively, by students are treated seriously, investigated carefully and, if found to be justified, are acted upon.

10. The principles on which this complaints procedure is based are that:

   (i) complaints from students should be dealt with seriously and fairly;
   (ii) complaints from students should be investigated promptly and, in general, as closely as possible to their origin;
   (iii) the principles of natural justice are followed in a manner which is appropriate to the individual circumstances of the complaint. Those who investigate or adjudicate on a complaint will do so impartially and fairly, and will not act in relation to any matter in which they have, or may have, a material interest, or an actual or potential conflict of interest.
   (iv) complaints should, as far as practicable, be treated in a similar fashion throughout the College;
   (v) all complaints will be judged on their individual merits and all complainants will be treated equally; there will be no victimisation of a complainant;
   (vi) all complaints will be dealt with in confidence as far as practicable to allow fair investigation;
   (vii) other than in exceptional circumstances, complaints which are made more than three months after the incident or action being complained about will not be investigated;
   (viii) complaints must be made by the students themselves and not by others acting on their behalf;
   (ix) in the event that meetings are arranged to discuss complaints, any student asked to attend such a meeting may be accompanied.
   (x) anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated, but a decision whether to investigate any such case, bearing in mind its circumstances, will be taken by the Deputy College Secretary;
   (xi) the Deputy College Secretary may propose the use of mediation procedures if s/he feels that a formal complaint justifies it.
Complaints Procedure (continued)

(xii) complaints considered to be frivolous or malicious will not be considered and the complainant may be liable for disciplinary action under the Student Disciplinary Regulations. Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered.

Making a Formal Complaint

11. A complaint that cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally should be submitted formally. This means that the complaint will be overseen by the College Secretary’s Office and a record of the complaint, investigation and outcome will be maintained.

12. Complainants are urged to submit their complaints as quickly as possible, and within three months of the incident or action being complained about. Complaints received over three months after the incident or action will only be accepted in extenuating circumstances and at the discretion of the Deputy College Secretary.

13. Complaints should be submitted on the form accessible at http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/documents/doc/201314formalcomplaintform.doc
   A copy of the form is attached as an appendix to this procedure document. If a student cannot access the form this way, they should request one from the Student Enquiries Desk, the Students’ Union or the College Secretary’s Office.

14. Completed complaint forms should be submitted electronically to secretariat@rhul.ac.uk.

Investigation

15. Submitted complaints will be acknowledged in writing and will be forwarded to an investigating officer, normally the appropriate Head of Department or Service. If appropriate advice may be sought from professional services, for example, from HR.

16. The Investigating Officer will investigate the complaint. At his / her discretion they may seek relevant information from any member of staff or invite the student or any other persons involved to discuss their complaint. If the complaint involves another member of College the Investigating Officer will inform them and allow the other individual(s) an opportunity to respond to any allegations against them.
17. The Investigating Officer may decide to call a meeting in order to establish more clearly the facts of the case and the nature of the complaint. The principles of natural justice will be adopted for any such meetings and in particular:

(i) all students and staff likely to be asked to appear shall be given as much notice as is practicable of the date and time of the meeting;

(ii) anyone appearing before the meeting may be accompanied provided prior notification is given.

(iii) If taken, meeting notes will be circulated to the student or staff member as appropriate. It is best practice to ask those present to agree whether the notes are a true reflection of what happened at the meeting.

(iv) Where a meeting discusses allegations relating to a student / member of staff that person should be given the opportunity to view the meeting notes and to respond in writing to any matters of concern.

18. The student will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation, which will be conducted as promptly as possible whilst ensuring that the complaint is fully considered.

Initial Findings

19. After considering all the evidence and submissions the Investigating Officer may decide to uphold or not uphold the complaint. They may also find the complaint to be partially upheld, on which occasion it will be made clear what is and is not upheld.

20. The Investigating Officer and/or the Deputy College Secretary may make any recommendations or remedy which s/he deems appropriate in the light of the investigation and outcomes.

21. The Investigating Officer will normally inform the student in writing of his/her decision and the reasons as soon as is practicable. The reasons for the decision will normally be given along with details of the next steps.

Opportunity to Respond

22. Students who are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation shall be given the opportunity to respond to the initial findings before a final outcome letter is issued.
Complaints Procedure (continued)

Students will be given up to 2 weeks after having received the Initial Findings Letter in order to submit their response.

23. The complainant should submit a statement in which he/she clearly state how their response relates to one or more of the following grounds:

   (i) The Investigating Officer misunderstood the complaint
   (ii) The process was not conducted in accordance with the principles and procedures set out in the procedures, or were contrary to natural justice
   (iii) Fresh evidence or information could be presented which would influence the final decision.

24. A Vice Principal (or nominee) shall consider the details of the case and all relevant documentation provided by the Investigating Officer. He/she will review the case and may, if necessary, take further advice. It may be possible for the complaint to be resolved using the documentation provided, otherwise a meeting may be called at which both the student and any other persons involved may put their views forward.

25. Where possible, a decision shall normally be communicated to the student within twenty working days of submission to the College Secretary’s Office, though this may be longer at certain times of the year or where a meeting is held. The student shall be kept informed of the progress of their complaint.

Final Outcome

26. Once the College Secretary’s Office is satisfied that the investigation is complete, they will issue a Completion of Procedures letter confirming the College’s final decision on the complaint.

Remedy or Redress

27. At any stage of this procedure it may be found that a complaint is partly or fully upheld and that some form of remedy or redress is appropriate.

28. Redress involving academic judgement can only be considered in accordance with the Academic Regulations
29. A complaint from a student may lead to disciplinary action against another student or students, under the Student Disciplinary Regulations. In such circumstances a student who has made the complaint may be required to give evidence as part of the disciplinary procedures. Student complaints may also give rise to disciplinary action against a member or members of staff in accordance with College Procedures. In such circumstances a student who has made a complaint may be required to give evidence as part of the disciplinary procedures.

Adjudication of College Decisions

30. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they may be able to apply for a review of the complaint by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) within three months of the Completion of Procedures letter, providing that the complaint is eligible under the Rules of the OIA. This will be advised

31. Where there are concerns about academic standards and quality, to the extent that the concerns indicate serious systemic or procedural problems, the complainant may also be able to register their concerns with the Quality Assurance Agency: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Complaints/Pages/default.aspx

Monitoring and Records

32. The College Council will receive regular reports (not less than one each academic year) concerning the operation of the complaints procedure. Such reports will not contain any confidential information relating to individual cases.

33. Records of formal complaints will be maintained by the College Secretary's Office, and will be kept securely. They will not form part of the official student record.
Appendix 1

Appropriate routes for circumstances excluded from the Student Complaints Procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstance excluded from the Student Complaint Procedure</th>
<th>Permissible alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The outcome of Boards of Examiners, including marks awarded for coursework, examinations or formal reviews, academic progression, degree classification or degree award, and termination of registration by the College Board of Examiners.</td>
<td>You may be able to appeal against the outcome of examinations or termination of registration on academic grounds. See the Academic Appeals Procedure in the Academic Regulations. If, however, the grounds of appeal are matters covered by this complaints procedure, the Investigating Officer of the appeal may at his/her discretion suspend the Appeals process whilst the complaint is investigated. The outcome of the complaint will inform the appeal decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penalties for examination and assessment offences</td>
<td>You may be able to appeal against penalties for examination and assessment offences. See the Regulations on assessment offences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconsideration of requests for special assessment arrangements</td>
<td>You may be able to request a reconsideration of requests for special assessment arrangements. See the Regulations on special assessment arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A decision made by a Fitness to Practise Panel</td>
<td>You may be able to appeal against the termination of registration on grounds of fitness to practice. See the Fitness to Practise Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If disciplinary action has been taken against you under the disciplinary procedures relating to non-academic matters and you wish to appeal against such action</td>
<td>You should follow the relevant sections of the regulations, set out in the Student Handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you feel that you have been subject to personal harassment</td>
<td>Please see the arrangements set out in the Code of Practice on Personal Harassment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you have a complaint about the</td>
<td>You should follow the procedures set out in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complaints Procedure (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students' Union</th>
<th>the Students' Union complaints procedure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you have a complaint about the Health Centre</td>
<td>You should use the Health Centre's complaints procedure. Complaint forms are available in the Health Centre Reception, the Student Services Office and the Students' Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you are experiencing problems with student fees, including non-payment of debts</td>
<td>You should contact <a href="mailto:student-fees@rhul.ac.uk">student-fees@rhul.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMPLAINT FORM

This form should be used to submit a **Formal Complaint**.

Before completing this formal complaint form, students should seek to resolve any difficulties informally, referring to paragraphs 2 and 9-11 of the College Complaints Procedure which can be found at [http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/documents/pdf/support/complaintsprocedure.pdf](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/documents/pdf/support/complaintsprocedure.pdf) as well as the online guidance for students which can be found at [http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/complaints/thecomplaintprocess.aspx](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/complaints/thecomplaintprocess.aspx)

If, having sought to resolve the issue informally, you still wish to proceed with a formal complaint you should read paragraphs 12 - 14 of the College Complaints Procedure which can be found at [http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/documents/pdf/support/complaintsprocedure.pdf](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/documents/pdf/support/complaintsprocedure.pdf) as well as the online guidance for students which can be found at [http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/complaints/thecomplaintprocess.aspx](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/complaints/thecomplaintprocess.aspx)

Please complete all the following sections (A-F)

**A) YOUR DETAILS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family name:</th>
<th>First name(s):</th>
<th>Title:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student number:</th>
<th>Telephone number:</th>
<th>Year of study during 2013/14: (eg. 3rd year)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
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Department and Degree Programme:
Complaints Procedure (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address for correspondence:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Please notify us promptly of any changes.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-mail address:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please note that <strong>the College will use your student email address</strong> for correspondence. However, you may provide us with an additional email address.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NATURE OF THE COMPLAINT

Please tick which category your complaint falls under (see guidance pages for descriptions and/or examples of each):

Category 1: Teaching and Assessment
☐ (a) Teaching
☐ (b) Tutorial and academic pastoral support
☐ (c) Curriculum

Category 2: University Services
☐ (a) School/Department administrative services
☐ (b) Central administrative services

Category 3: Other Services or General
☐ (a) Other
☐ (b) General

Please set out as concisely as possible the nature of your complaint; in particular it is important to know the names of any other persons involved (staff, students or others), when the event or incident occurred and the exact circumstances of the event or incident.
B) PREVIOUS ACTION

Have you raised the matter with the person(s) involved?

☐ YES  ☐ NO*

Have you raised the matter with the Head of Department/Service?

☐ YES  ☐ NO*

Have you taken advice from the Students’ Union

☐ YES  ☐ NO*

*If you have not communicated with one/any of the above, please consider doing so before submitting a formal complaint.

Please explain with whom within the College, if anyone, you have raised the matter. If you have not raised it before, please explain your reasons why.

C) DESIRED OUTCOME

Please explain the purpose of your complaint and whether there is a specific outcome that you are hoping for.
D) IMPORTANT NOTE

You should be aware that some complaints may give rise to disciplinary action against:
- other students under the Regulations governing Non-Academic Offences;
  or
- staff in accordance with College Procedures

If a complaint is considered by the College Secretary to be frivolous or malicious, the student making the complaint may be liable for disciplinary action under the Regulations governing Non-Academic Offences.

E) DECLARATION

- I have read*/not read* the College's Complaints Procedures for Students (June 2013).
- I declare that the information contained on this form is correct.

*Please delete as appropriate

| Signature: | Date: |