

Complaints Procedure [Newman/Gloucester/Vu/Not for Credit students]

The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

STUDENT COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Introduction

1 The Foundation is committed to providing a high quality educational experience, fully supported by a range of academic and administrative services and facilities. From time to time, however, things do go wrong, and the Foundation recognises the need for students to be able to express their dissatisfaction where this happens. As a Christian community we wish to be shaped by values of trust, mutuality, faithfulness, and truthfulness, and we seek to learn together what it means to be a community of forgiveness and reconciliation. Such aspirations and commitments do not preclude careful attention to procedures and policies, rather these help to hold us to account for how we conduct ourselves. But neither can these procedures exhaust what we hope and work for in our relationships together as brothers and sisters in Christ and members of his body. They are for us necessary but limited steps on a journey toward the formation of a community of grace and justice for which we, and God, long.

2 This Complaints Procedure (hereafter 'the Procedure'), provides students with an accessible system for raising concerns, and ensures that their complaints are handled as fairly, consistently and quickly as possible.

3 All complaints will be dealt with constructively and, where a complaint is upheld, the Foundation will take reasonable action to ensure that similar situations do not occur in the future.

4 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, in the interests of natural justice, if others are named in a complaint, they have the right to know the full details of the complaint and will, therefore, receive a copy of the complaint.

5 Students who make complaints (hereafter 'Complainant(s)') through this procedure may do so without fear of recrimination.

6 Where a complaint is shown to be motivated by malice, disciplinary action may be taken against the Complainant(s).

7 Every effort will be made to adhere to the time limits set out in this Procedure. There may be occasions, however, when this is not possible. In this event the Complainant(s) will be kept informed of progress.

8 For the purposes of this Procedure 'working days' refers to Mondays – Fridays, excluding Public Holidays and Closed Days.

9 In order to ensure that a thorough investigation of a complaint is made, the Foundation expects to be able to collect appropriate information from all the parties involved. Anonymous complaints, therefore, will not be dealt with under this Procedure.

10 The Principal reports annually to the Governors on all formal complaints raised during the year. These reports form part of the Foundation's quality assurance process. These reports are anonymised.

11 Papers relating to formal complaints will be held on file for three years from the date of resolution of the complaint and will then be destroyed.

Scope of the Procedure

12 The Procedure is restricted to currently registered students of the Foundation [excluding Durham university students who should refer to their own policy]. However, it can be used by former students within three months of leaving the Foundation, provided that the event(s) or issues complained about took place while they were registered students.

13 No complaints from third parties will be dealt with under this Procedure. Correspondence will not normally be entered into with third parties, except in exceptional circumstances, and only with the signed authority of the complainant(s). The letter confirming the outcome of a complaint will be sent only to the complainant.

14 The Procedure, which can be used for both individual and collective complaints, is designed for complaints relating to:

- Programmes, modules, services or facilities provided by the Foundation;
- Actions, or lack of actions, by the Foundation and its staff.

15 Where a complaint concerns a placement which contributes to a programme the nature of the complaint will dictate whether the complaint should be addressed by the organisation providing the placement or by the Foundation.

16 The Procedure should **not** be used for any of the following, for which separate procedures exist.

1. Racial or Sexual Harassment;
2. Appeals against academic assessment and progress decisions;
3. Review of admissions decisions;
4. Appeals against disciplinary or other penalties;
5. Claims in respect of personal injury or damage to property;
6. Staffing issues, where the Complainant is also a member of staff;

17 Where a complaint concerns the professional conduct of a member of the Foundation's staff the Principal may decide to refer the matter back to the Director of the relevant centre for investigation at local level, rather than having several procedures operating in tandem.

18 The Student Complaints Procedure cannot be used to challenge the professional academic judgment of examiners on the performance of students.

19 If, upon receipt of a complaint, it is felt that the issues raised fall into one of the categories listed in paragraphs 14 to 17 above, Complainant(s) will be advised how to proceed by the Principal. The Foundation may decide that, in the interests of fairness, a complaint which contains elements falling within these categories should be resolved solely within one of those designated procedures.

20 Where the complaint is against the Principal personally the Complainant should address the complaint to the Academic Dean, who will also consult with the President of the Governors about the process for the complaint to be heard.

21 Where a complaint is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, the student may then submit a formal complaint to the relevant validating University, subject to the formal agreement concerning the collaborative provision.

22 Students who remain dissatisfied with the final outcome of the Complaint Process may make a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education. This is a free service to students and details can be found on the OIA website www.oiahe.org.uk or by writing to the OIA at: OIA Third Floor, Kings Reach 38-50 Kings Road Reading RG1 1LX

Stages

22 The procedure is divided into three stages:

Informal

- Attempt to resolve complaint at local level (paragraphs 22 to 30);

Formal

- Mediation (paragraphs 31 to 36)
- Review/adjudication

Informal Complaints: Attempt to resolve the complaint at local level

23 Save in exceptional and fully documented circumstances it is expected that a complaint would normally be raised within one month of the incident giving rise to the complaint.

24 It is expected that most complaints will be resolved informally and as close to the origin of the complaint as possible. Students should first review whether they have fulfilled their responsibilities in accordance with the various handbooks issued. If so, the student should raise the complaint initially with the most appropriate member of staff within the relevant Centre (e.g. the Personal Tutor or Director) who will try to resolve the complaint.

25 If this is not possible the student may raise the complaint in writing (which may be by email) to the Principal within one month of the date of the initial response. The Principal may make some initial investigations and try to resolve the complaint themselves or appoint a nominee to do so on their behalf.

26 The Principal (or their nominee) should arrange a meeting with the student to discuss the complaint in detail. The student is entitled to be accompanied at any such meeting by someone who should be a member of the Foundation ('a friend'). The role of the friend is to support the student, and not normally to assist them to explain the nature of the complaint. If, after reasonable attempts to arrange the meeting, the student is unwilling or unable to attend, the Principal may proceed with their investigation in the absence of the student.

27 If all parties are agreeable, mediation may be attempted at the informal as well as at the formal stage of the Procedure.

28 The Principal (or their nominee) will investigate the matter and provide a detailed written response to the Complainant(s), normally within 20 working days of the date of the receipt of the written complaint. A copy of this response will be sent to the relevant centre director.

Possible responses to the complainant may include:

- Letter of explanation and/or apology
- Recommendations for further actions within the Foundation
- Recommendations for changes in Foundation procedures/policies etc to be submitted to the appropriate Foundation Committee

29 If, having pursued the matter informally, the Complainant(s) believes that their concerns have not been addressed to her/his satisfaction, the matter may be raised through the formal stages of this Procedure set out below.

30 The Chaplain is available to provide support for students during this process.

Formal Complaints

31 The Formal Complaints Procedure may only be commenced after the informal process has been completed. Formal complaints must be made in writing, using the Foundation's complaints form, within one month of the date of the response from the Principal or their nominee at the informal stage.

32 Copies of the complaints form are available on Moodle. When completed it should be sent to the Principal. The form should detail the aspects of the complaint, what action has been taken by the student to attempt a resolution, and why the action taken by the Centre following notification of the complaint, has not led to resolution of the complaint. The desired redress should be clearly stated.

33 Complaints will be acknowledged by the Principal within 5 working days of receipt. In some cases, the Principal may be able to resolve the student's difficulty. Where a resolution is proposed in writing to the Complainant(s) by the Principal, the Complainant(s) must indicate in writing within one month whether s/he is prepared to accept the proposed resolution, or whether s/he wishes to proceed to mediation.

Mediation

34 Where it is not possible for the Principal to resolve the complaint, it will normally be referred to a complaints mediator whose task is to attempt to help the student and the Centre or individual about whom the complaint is made, together to find a resolution to the complaint that is satisfactory to all parties. The mediator will meet with the student and will also discuss the matter with those about whom the complaint is made, and, in whatever manner the mediator feels appropriate, attempt to help all those involved to resolve the difficulties or disagreements. This may involve a meeting with both the student and the Director of the Centre or Principal (or their nominee) together. The student is entitled to be accompanied at any such meeting by a friend. The mediator will act promptly. The process is confidential, although an anonymous report may be forwarded by the mediator to an appropriate committee where issues concerning quality and provision for students have been raised.

35 If the complaint is resolved, the mediator will normally put any agreement between the parties in writing for their benefit.

36 If the complaint remains unresolved, the mediator will discuss the reasons with the student and the Director of the Centre or Principal (or their nominee) and prepare a statement agreed by both parties on the outstanding issues.

Review and Adjudication

37 Parties will be referred to the relevant University procedure

The Procedure was approved and adopted by the Governors of the Queen's Foundation on the recommendation of the Equality and Diversity Committee on 24th June 2009.