

# St Peter's College Student Complaints Procedure

Approved by the Governing Body on 16 May 2018; revised 31 October 2018<sup>1</sup>

## A. Introduction

1. St Peter's College welcomes feedback from its members and takes seriously complaints about any aspect of its activity. The College endeavours to resolve complaints promptly and locally, and will not disadvantage anyone for making a genuine complaint.
2. The aims of the College as reflected in these procedures are to:
  - a) Provide a clear and accessible mechanism by which complaints can be addressed in a timely way;
  - b) Respond proportionately to issues, supporting the resolution of complaints at a local level and in an informal manner wherever possible and appropriate;
  - c) Ensure that all involved are treated fairly and with respect, avoiding the possibility of conflicts of interest amongst those taking decisions; and to
  - d) Learn from any mistakes or problems to ensure that future provision for students is improved.

This procedure is written with reference to the *Good Practice Framework* issued by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education<sup>2</sup> and covers complaints made by students (or those who have recently completed their studies at the College).

3. Typically, complaints will refer to isolated incidents and the provision of services by the College. The procedures outlined below are intended to be followed in cases of disagreement with regard to:
  - a) Domestic matters, including accommodation and catering matters and welfare provision;
  - b) Financial matters, including charges for fees and accommodation and the award of hardship or other funding;
  - c) Academic matters, including the provision of teaching, collections and the awarding of prizes.
4. These Student Complaint Procedures do not cover the following matters:
  - a) Requests for new or different services or provision;
  - b) Complaints about a University department or service<sup>3</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> Updated in July 2020 to reflect the approval by Governing Body of the *Non-academic Discipline Procedure* (affects paragraph 4.c of this *Complaints Procedure*).

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/96361/oia-good-practice-framework.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See the relevant section of the University Student Handbook, which can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/student-handbook>

- c) Disciplinary procedures, either non-academic<sup>4</sup> or academic<sup>5</sup>,
- d) Complaints which solely concern matters of academic judgement<sup>6</sup>,
- e) Complaints raised by individuals other than those who are students of the College.

5. The majority of potential cases will normally be settled without use of the procedures set out below, by the complainant discussing their concern with the relevant tutor or college staff member or departmental manager. Where this has been attempted and resolution has not been achieved, complainants can follow the informal procedure (described in Section B) and then the formal procedure (described in Section C). Section D provides for a review of the formal handling of the complaint.

6. For meetings or interviews at any stage of the informal or formal procedures, the student complainant can be accompanied a third party supporter. This will be either another student member of the College, a member of the College welfare team, a senior member of the College, or a member of staff from OxfordSU's Student Advice Service.

7. Anonymous complainants or complaints made on behalf of someone else will not be considered, unless there are compelling reasons for doing so. Such reasons should be clearly stated.

8. Disciplinary action may be taken against anyone who victimises or retaliates against a student who brings a complaint in good faith, and against any student who brings malicious or vexatious complaints.

## **B. Informal Procedure**

9. This informal procedure is intended to encourage discussion and understanding of the problem, and in most cases, will lead to its resolution without submission of a formal complaint. Where an attempt has already been made to resolve a complaint or issue informally and promptly (as set out in paragraph 5 above) and if that attempt has already involved the relevant College Officer or departmental manager, then it may be appropriate to omit the informal procedure and move straight to the formal procedure set out in Section C.

10. Student complainants should raise their complaint with the College Officer or departmental manager who appears most appropriate to deal with it. Some examples are given below:

- for academic matters (undergraduate): the Senior Tutor
- for academic matters (graduate): the Tutor for Graduates
- for domestic, accommodation and security matters: the Accommodation and Events Manager
- for catering matters: the Catering Manager

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<sup>4</sup> See the College's *Student Regulations*, located on the College website and in the Student Administrative Handbook and the *Non-academic Discipline Procedure (NADP)*, also located on the College website.

<sup>5</sup> See the College's *Academic Expectations and Disciplinary Procedures (AEDP)*, located on the College website.

<sup>6</sup> Academic judgment is a judgment that is made about a matter where only the opinion of an academic expert is sufficient. For further information see <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/glossary.aspx#academic>.

- for IT matters: the IT Manager
- for financial matters: the College Accountant
- for Library matters: the Librarian
- for welfare matters: the Dean for Welfare

In case of doubt about the appropriate route to raise a complaint under this informal procedure, the College Registrar or Bursar may be consulted and an appropriate route agreed.

11. The complaint should be raised as soon as possible after the actions, or lack of actions, which prompted it.

12. To resolve the complaint the relevant College Officer or departmental manager will normally arrange a meeting with the complainant, within five working days, and:

- seek to discover and understand the nature of the problem;
- try to find a remedy, or a reconciliation (in cases where relations have broken down between individuals, and the complainant does not object to this course);
- record the outcome in a written response to the complainant.

13. The possible outcomes might include (without being limited to):

- immediate action to resolve the problem if possible;
- the provision of an apology and/or explanation;
- the instigation of action under another College Procedure.

### **C. Formal Procedure**

14. The formal procedure will normally be used only when the informal procedure (or other informal discussion – see paragraphs 5 and 9 above) has not achieved a resolution. In cases where the student complainant has adopted the formal approach immediately, it will be open to the College Officer receiving the complaint to refer it back to an earlier stage in this process. Formal complaints will not normally be considered more than one month after the end of the informal procedure or in cases when the matter is being addressed under another College procedure.

15. The student complainant should address their complaint (in writing, and labelled 'Formal Complaint') to the relevant College Officer. Some examples are given below:

- for academic matters (undergraduate): the Senior Tutor
- for academic matters (graduate): the Tutor for Graduates
- for domestic, accommodation, catering, IT, security and financial matters: the Bursar
- for Library matters: the Fellow Librarian
- for welfare matters: the Tutor for Welfare
- for other matters, including complaints about one of College Officers listed above: the Master (or the Vice-Master in the case of a complaint about the Master)

In case of doubt about the appropriate route to raise a complaint under this formal procedure, the College Registrar or Bursar may be consulted and an appropriate route agreed.

16. The relevant College Officer will either investigate the complaint themselves or appoint another senior member of College (with no previous involvement in the matter complained about) to investigate the complaint.

17. The investigation process may involve interviews with the complainant and others involved, as well as a review of other information and documents. The investigation will be conducted as swiftly as the subject matter of the complaint allows (usually within one month).

18. Once the investigation is completed, the investigator will produce a report setting out the details of the investigation, including relevant evidence, and recommending appropriate remedies or other actions to be taken. This report will be shared with the student complainant and others involved.

19. Based on the written complaint and the investigation report, the relevant College Officer will make a reasoned decision about the outcome of the complaint, including any remedies or other actions, and will communicate this to the student complainant in writing.

20. Records of formal complaints received, the resulting investigation report and the records of the decision should be deposited with the College Registrar).

#### **D. Review stage**

21. If a student complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal procedure, they may request a review. A request should be made to the Master (except in cases where the Master was the lead College Officer for the formal procedure, or is the subject of the complaint, in which case the request should be made to the Vice-Master). The Master (or Vice-Master) may choose to appoint one or more members of the Governing Body (who have not previously been involved in the matter) to undertake the review on their behalf.

22. The review stage will only consider whether the appropriate procedures were followed and whether the outcome was reasonable. New evidence will not be considered unless the student complainant can provide valid reasons for why it was not provided during earlier stages in the procedure.

23. The outcome of the review stage will be communicated to the student complainant in writing, and a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued. The College Registrar will retain records of cases considered at the Review Stage.

#### **E. Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)**

24. A student may, if still unsatisfied with the outcome, take their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (see [www.oiahe.org.uk/](http://www.oiahe.org.uk/) for further information). The OIA will only consider cases in which the College's internal procedures have been completed (and thus in which a Completion of Procedures letter has been issued). Applications to the OIA must be submitted within 12 months of the date of Completion of Procedures letter.

**F. Monitoring, review and updating of this Procedure**

25. This Procedure may be found on the College website. Copies in alternative formats are available on request.

26. The Governing Body will receive a summary report from the College Registrar once a year on the number, type and outcome of complaints considered via the Formal Procedure or the Review Stage.

27. This Procedure will be subject to regular review by the Governing Body, on a three-year cycle. The next review is scheduled to take place in 2020-21.