Policy and Procedures for comments, suggestions and complaints

The College welcomes comments and suggestions from students about the services it provides. Students wishing to make a suggestion or comment about the College’s policies or services, either academic or non-academic, can do so informally:

- at the point where the service is provided, or
- by contacting the person in charge of the relevant area, or (where it seems appropriate)
- by raising the matter with the student representative on the appropriate College committee, or
- with their College Tutor.

Occasionally however, students may wish to make a complaint about the services they receive: that is, to express dissatisfaction about the College’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the College. This document sets out the procedure for making a complaint to the College. The College recognises that it has a duty to provide fair and objective procedures for examining and resolving complaints, and to ensure that its procedures are free from partiality arising from personal or institutional conflict of interest or other sources of bias. No student will be disadvantaged by having raised a complaint, but the College expects that students will not make frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints.

This document covers complaints from students only in areas that are within the control of the College. Students may have complaints that are within the control of other institutions, e.g. the University or another College. Some areas about which students may wish to comment or make a complaint are covered by other policy documents issued by the College and/or by University policies and procedures. Below is a brief guide to the different procedures. If you are unclear about where the responsibility lies for the matter that you wish to raise, then you should seek advice from your Tutor.

The College is responsible for all the services it provides for students, and comments or complaints about these should follow the procedures outlined in this document. This includes student-to-student complaints if these cannot be sorted out informally by the students themselves or by the WCSA Officers, who may be consulted about this type of complaint.

Harassment and Bullying
Both the College and the University have policies and procedures for dealing with racial and sexual harassment and bullying. The College’s policy on these matters, and the procedures for dealing with complaints, are available here. The University’s policy and procedures are given in the University of Cambridge Student’s Handbook.

Academic Matters: Undergraduates
For undergraduates responsibility for dealing with comments or complaints about academic matters is split between the College and the University. If undergraduates have any comments or complaints relating to supervision then these should be addressed either to the Supervisor concerned or to the Director of Studies, or to the Senior Tutor. If they wish to make comments about lectures, seminars, etc. organised by University Departments then they should raise the issue with the Department.
**Academic Matters: Postgraduates**

For postgraduate students, academic matters are dealt with, primarily, by the University Department in which the student is based. Comments or complaints about courses, supervisors, etc., should, therefore, be addressed to the designated person within the Department. The Degree Committee of the Faculty Board covering the Department in which a student is based will be responsible for such matters as dates of submission, extensions of time, leave to work away, removal and reinstatement on the Register of Postgraduate Students and any other matters relating to study for the Master's degree or the PhD. If, however, you feel you need advice about the appropriate procedures to follow in these matters, then you should discuss the issue with your Tutor.

**Examination Appeals**

For undergraduates, a separate procedure exists for appealing to the University in a case where a student feels he or she has been disadvantaged or unfairly classified in a University Examination. Such appeals, however, do have to be made via the College; therefore, any student who wishes to appeal should first consult their Tutor.

For postgraduate students, any appeal relating to the examination for the Master's degree or the PhD has to be made through the Board of Graduate Studies. For advice about the appropriate procedures to follow, consult your Tutor.

**PROCEDURES FOR COLLEGE MATTERS**

The College expects that complaints will normally be dealt with informally in the first instance. It should be possible to resolve most problems quite quickly in this way, avoiding stress and saving time. Students with a complaint should seek to bring it to the attention of the College, using the procedure outlined here, as soon as possible following the occurrence of a problem, and ideally within one month. Many complaints can be dealt with quickly and effectively in this manner, without recourse to formal procedure. The College's procedures have been developed with this in mind.

At the outset, a student with a complaint to make will be invited to suggest the remedy they are seeking, without prejudice to the outcome.

**Confidentiality**

Every attempt will be made to maintain the confidentiality of a complainant. However, where a complaint is of a personal nature against an individual, it is likely that the complainant's identity would have to be revealed at some stage in all but the most exceptional cases in order for there to be a fair investigation. For example, where a complaint is made against an individual, that person has the right to know who is complaining against them and what is the nature of the complaint. The College will endeavour to inform an individual complainant of the extent to which their identity is likely to be revealed at each stage of the procedure.

**INFORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

Students who experience a problem with any service provided by the College or anything else within the control of the College can, under the informal procedure, raise the matter in a number of ways.

Either:-

They can raise the matter directly with the individual who has given cause for complaint. If informal discussion does not resolve the situation satisfactorily, the person responsible for the area to which the complaint relates can be approached. If that still does not resolve the issue, then students should consult their Tutor.
Or:-
If they prefer, they can raise the matter with their Tutor immediately.

If the matter relates to a student-to-student complaint a similar course of action can be followed. The matter can be raised directly with the student who is giving cause for complaint. If informal discussion does not resolve the issue then the matter can be raised with WCSA officers or with the WCSA President, and if that still does not resolve the issue the student should consult their Tutor. Alternatively the student could consult his or her Tutor immediately.

**FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

**Stage One:** If the matter cannot be resolved satisfactorily a complaint should be made in writing to the Senior Tutor, who will acknowledge receipt and ensure that the matter is looked into as soon as possible. An initial response to any complaint can be expected within 7 days of its receipt, and a considered response to the complaint should be received within a further three weeks, with any subsequent remedy implemented with the minimum of delay.

In some cases the informal procedure set out above may have already involved the Senior Tutor. In that case, or if the complaint is against the Senior Tutor, the complaint should be put in writing to the President who will appoint another Senior Member of the College to act in the place of the Senior Tutor.

**Stage Two (Review):** It is hoped that very few complaints would remain unresolved after Stage One. However should the complainant be unsatisfied with the response received after Stage One, the complainant can request a review of the process. The Senior Tutor (or other Senior Member of College who has acted in place of the Senior Tutor) will refer the matter to the President who will arrange for the College Council to undertake an independent assessment of the case and come to a conclusion on the matter. To do so the Council will appoint two members of the Governing Body, a Senior Tutor from another College and a student representative if the complainant so chooses, or otherwise three members of the Governing Body and a Senior Tutor from another College, to consider the matter and respond. None of those appointed to do so will have been involved in the matter previously. A full and considered response to the complaint should be completed within six weeks and any subsequent remedy implemented with the minimum of delay.

If a student is required to attend in person as part of the investigation into a complaint, they are entitled to be accompanied at any stage by a member of the College or the University: this could be a Tutor or other senior member, or a student including one of the WCSA officers, or an officer of CUSU or the Graduate Union or the Student Advice Service.

Throughout any formal complaints procedure a written record of the complaint will be recorded and made available on request to anyone involved in the matter, subject to what is said about confidentiality above. At Stage 1 above the written record will be maintained by the Senior Tutor; at Stage 2 it will be the responsibility of the members of the Governing Body appointed by the Council to arrange for one of their number to keep a written record and to send a copy to the Secretary of the Council.

If a student remains unsatisfied after the review stage, he or she may request a ‘letter of completion’ in order to enable recourse to the OIA (see below).

**The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)**

The OIA provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. A student can bring most types of complaint to the OIA if internal procedures have been exhausted (the main exceptions are matters to do with admissions or questions of academic judgement). Information about the OIA
can be found on http://www.oiahe.org.uk/. Advice on the appropriate procedures may be obtained from the Senior Tutor.

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