

COMPLAINTS' PROCEDURE FOR HE STUDENTS

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Related Documents: Access & Higher Education Student Terms and Conditions, Access & HE Student Tuition Fees & Refund Policy, Access & Higher Education Student Information & Consumer Protection Policy, HE academic appeals

Rationale

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK Quality Code sets out the expectations that all higher education (HE) providers are required to meet the expectation in regards to academic appeals and student complaints is that:

“Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement”.

The policy has addressed this expectation along with best practice guidance from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) and with consideration of recent advice from Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The College welcomes feedback regarding perceived problems so that they can be addressed and improvements made to improve services and enhance the student experience. The College actively encourages higher education students to evaluate their course and overall experience, providing feedback through a variety of methods. The College seeks to minimise formal student complaints through these means as feedback is addressed and suggestions for improvement implemented. Whilst much of the feedback received is positive, it is recognised that there may be occasions when problems arise. Any person coming into contact with the College who is dissatisfied with their experience, can express concern or raise a complaint, (but only current and former students have recourse to the OIA).

The Complaints Procedure is intended for the use of students and can be applied appropriately, for the use of stakeholders and external users of College facilities, who may have a complaint about any aspect of life at the College or the education and other services provided by it.

A complaint may be a minor problem e.g. not being satisfied with the quality of feedback on a particular piece of homework, or a major one e.g. bullying; feeling that you are not being taught properly. Speaking to the member of staff concerned may clear up minor problems quickly and informally. If they are not dealt with satisfactorily at this stage, you may need to follow the procedures outlined below, starting at step 1. For serious complaints, go straight to step 2.

Aims of the Complaints Procedure

1. Complaints to be dealt with fairly and quickly
2. All complaints will be investigated thoroughly. This may involve obtaining statements, interviewing witnesses or some form of hearing.
3. An initial response to be made as soon as possible and certainly within 10 working days.
4. The complainant to be kept informed of every step taken.

5. A clear explanation of the outcome of the complaint given. In the case of complaints beyond step 1 a letter will be sent to the complainant covering such issues as the complaint, how it was dealt with, the action taken, and any further steps which then follow including the right of appeal.

Learning from Complaints

Each complaint will be reported individually to the HE Committee (HEC), for monitoring purposes. The Senior Leadership Team of the College and the Curriculum and Learning Committee will receive termly reports as a Key Performance Indicator. The Corporation will receive an annual report. The purpose of such reports will be to provide the College with information which will help it to develop its processes either by making an immediate change if necessary or if more significant and prolonged change is required, through inclusion in the College's annual Improvement Plan.

The Procedure You Should Follow

If there is any aspect of College life that you are not satisfied with, you have the right to make a complaint.

Step 1

Where the complaint is about an assessment grade, you must follow the assessment appeals procedure for your course. This procedure can be found on JCC HE.

For other problems where you feel you have been treated unfairly you should begin discussing the problem with the member of staff directly. If you feel uncomfortable about doing this then you could seek informal advice from, for example, another member of the course team or your tutor.

Often a simple chat, exchange of views, mutual apology, etc. can solve a problem before it gets too serious. This may involve the immediate manager of the relevant member of staff.

At this stage, the matter will be dealt with informally, and ideally, a mutually agreeable solution found. Nothing need be recorded unless you or the staff member, wish to do so.

Generally, problems can be sorted out at this stage but if you are not satisfied by the outcome of Step 1, you should move to Step 2.

Step 2

If you still have a difficulty, or are not happy with what has been done, you are entitled to take your complaint to the Director HE and Adult Learning of the appropriate curriculum or pastoral area for further informal discussion, investigation and resolution.

If it is still not resolved when you have discussed you are entitled to follow the formal student complaints procedure:

- a. Put the complaint in writing, within **ten working days** of when unfairly treated. Explain the reasons and background to your complaint and send it to the Assistant Principal (Students and Operations). If your complaint concerns the Assistant Principal (Students and Operations) then you should send it to the Vice Principal. You should give your name and College roll number so the complaint can be followed up correctly. You should hand in your complaint to Reception and ensure it is addressed to the Assistant Principal (Students and Operations) (Complaints) or Vice Principal (Complaints). A form is available in Reception.
- b. The Assistant Principal (Students and Operations) will decide which senior member of staff should deal with your complaint. The senior member of staff dealing with the complaint will contact you, usually within **five working days** of you handing in the complaint, to confirm it is being investigated.
- c. You will receive a written response from the senior member of staff, usually within **10 working days** of the confirmation. The response will explain the findings of the investigation and any action to be taken. If the complaint is found to be unjustified, the reasons will be clearly stated.
- d. If the complaint is about the Assistant Principal (Students and Operations) or other member of senior staff you should write to the Principal. If the complaint is against the Principal, you should write to the Chair of the Governors' Audit Committee.
- e. Any person against whom a complaint has been made will be informed of the nature of the complaint.
- f. A confidential written record signed by you and kept by you and by the Assistant Principal (Students and Operations). This will include details of the complaint, and the action taken.

Step 3

If you are dissatisfied with the response, you may appeal, in writing within **five working days** of the Assistant Principal (Students and Operations) decision. Your appeal should be handed in to Reception and addressed to the Vice Principal who will review the action and responses so far. You will receive a written response usually within **ten working days**. If you are dissatisfied with the Vice Principal's response you may appeal to the Principal in writing within **five working days**. You will receive a written response usually within **ten working days**. This will be the end of the College's procedure. This written response will constitute a *Completion of Procedures*.

Where the complaint is about the Principal the appeal should be made to the Chair of the Corporation. You will receive a written response usually within **ten working days**. This will be the end of the College's procedure. This written response will constitute a *Completion of Procedures*.

For students studying HE programmes awarded by a university partner, for example, the Diploma in Education and Training with Birmingham City University, students may also submit a complaint to the University about any aspect of their experience that is directly within the control of the University, including issues relating to accessing University resources or services, or an act or perceived omission on the part of the University or a member of its staff. Students will be made aware of the University's complaints procedure and its application to students on collaborative programmes, as part of their induction and through their Programme Handbook.

The OIA

If a complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome they may refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), provided that the complaint is eligible under its rules and a *Completion of Procedures* letter has been issued.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. Joseph Chamberlain College is a member of this scheme. If you are unhappy with the outcome you may be able to ask the OIA to review your case. You can find more information about making a complaint to the OIA, what it can and can't look at and what it can do to put things right here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>.

You normally need to have completed this procedure before you complain to the OIA. We will send you a letter called a "Completion of Procedures Letter" when you have reached the end of our processes and there are no further steps you can take internally. If your complaint is not upheld, we will issue you with a Completion of Procedures Letter automatically. If your complaint is upheld or partly upheld you can ask for a Completion of Procedures Letter if you want one. You can find more information about Completion of Procedures Letters and when you should expect to receive one here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters>.

Further information regarding the OIA can be found on the OIA website: www.oiahe.org.uk