

CCG | Higher Education

Brinsbury | Chichester | Crawley | Northbrook | Worthing

HE Complaints Policy

Policy review area	Higher Education
Lead Manager	HE Quality Manager
Approval level	HE Board
Start date	November 2023
Review cycle	Annually
Next review	May 2024

1. Introduction and Context

The CCG Complaints Policy is intended to bring matters of concern to the attention of the College, and facilitate the timely investigation and addressing of these concerns. The process provides welcome feedback to help the Group improve.

The CCG Admissions Policy sets out the process for complaints / appeals relating to the admissions process or an admissions decision and the Academic Appeals Policy explains the process for appealing against an assessment grade. For courses that are franchised or validated by University partners the Appeals Policy that is appropriate to the course will be used in dealing with any appeals. These are available on the CCG website and a link can be found in the programme handbook.

2. Principles and Scope

- 2.1 Chichester College Group will make available opportunities for students to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage or prejudice.
- 2.2 This policy is for use by students, apprentices, parents/carers of under 19s, employers, former employees, clients and the general public.
- 2.3 Chichester College Group will encourage constructive engagement with the complaints process which offers opportunities for early and informal resolution.
- 2.4 Complainants may appoint a representative to deal with matters (including any responses) on their behalf – for example a parent or guardian. This will need to be confirmed by the complainant in writing or, where necessary, using an alternative method of communication.
- 2.5 This policy aims to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved. The Complaints process is confidential.
- 2.6 No complainant bringing a complaint under this policy will be treated less favourably by any member of staff. If there is evidence to the contrary, the member of staff may be subject to disciplinary proceedings.
- 2.7 If a student is found to have made a malicious complaint, this could lead to disciplinary action being taken.
- 2.8 A person making a complaint is encouraged to identify themselves. The college will have difficulty investigating anonymous complaints and will not be in a position to advise the complainant of the outcome of action taken by the college. The college does reserve the right to determine whether to investigate an anonymous complaint in light of the following considerations:
 - The seriousness of the issues raised in the disclosure
 - The credibility of the concern
 - How likely it is that the concern can be confirmed from attributable sources.
- 2.9 The complaints process is monitored by the college's senior HE Deliberative Body (the HE Board) which will review policy and operations following complaints and will require changes to practice where appropriate. The HE Board will monitor and evaluate the complaints procedure and reflect outcomes from complaints in order to enhance learning opportunities.
 - i. Separate procedures exist for the following:

- Student Behaviour– covered by the Student Code of Behaviour and Positive Behaviour Management
- Staff Complaints – covered by the Grievance Policy and Procedure.
- Higher Education Assessment and Accreditation Complaints – covered by the Academic Appeals Procedure of the relevant awarding body.
- Contractors' Complaints – will be dealt with as appropriate under the terms of the contract.
- Allegations of Discrimination – covered by the Student Code of Behaviour and Positive Behaviour Management
- Allegations of Malpractice – covered by the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.

3. Definition

- 3.1 Feedback: Compliments, comments or suggestions on how we can improve, but not necessarily requiring a formal written response.
- 3.2 Formal complaint: The College defines a formal complaint as “any expression of dissatisfaction received in writing and requiring a formal, written response”.

Aim

To ensure all complaints are handled fairly, consistently, and, wherever possible, resolved to the complainant’s satisfaction. The Complaints procedure (see Appendix 1 for flowchart)

4. Stage 1

- 4.1 Where possible, an early resolution to address concerns swiftly and locally should be sought prior to making a formal complaint. The complainant should raise their concerns with the member of staff who has direct responsibility for the matter in question to try to achieve a satisfactory resolution. Where proportionate, a response will be given in writing to the complainant. The area with responsibility for the subject of the informal complaint is encouraged to take all steps to resolve the concerns that have been raised, in an effort to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the complainant.
- 4.2 If the complainant does not feel that their concerns have been addressed by the member of staff with direct responsibility, or that they cannot discuss this with them, then they should make a formal complaint. This should be addressed to the HE Quality Manager and sent to the HE Dropbox: HE@chichester.ac.uk, include contact details and outline why they feel the complaint could not be resolved at the informal stage.

5. Stage 2

- 5.1 Once the complaint has been received by the HE Quality Manager it will be acknowledged within **5 Working days**. The complainant will be given an indication of when they will receive a response, a copy of the complaints policy, and an avenue for further contact.
- 5.2 If a College Department receives a formal complaint in writing either via email or hard copy they must ensure this is sent to the HE Quality Manager in order for the formal complaint to be logged and formally acknowledged. If the HE Quality Manager requires the complainant to provide further information, they will contact the complainant and refer them to the Complaints Form available on the college website.
- 5.3 The HE Quality Manager will then appoint an appropriate investigating manager who will conduct a full investigation. The investigating manager will be a Head of Learning / departmental Manager.

- 5.4 Within **15 working days** of receiving a complaint, the investigating manager will provide the HE Quality Manager with the results of the investigation in an email or signed letter of reply, and the HE Quality Manager will sense check the response and forward it to the complainant.
- 5.5 The HE Quality Manager will provide the College's Senior Leadership Team with a termly report showing all complaints, where a complaint has not been fully resolved, or where the complaint is not resolved within the above timescales as well as a summary of any recommendations
- 5.6 It is incumbent on the Investigating Manager to ensure that any decision made is supported by clear reasoning and this should be communicated in the final report which will be shared with the complainant. The HE Quality Manager will share guidance with managers who are new to the process. The investigating manager will make a judgement based on evidence gathered and will decide to:
- dismiss the complaint as unfounded giving reasons
 - uphold or partially uphold the complaint, propose an amicable settlement, take appropriate steps to address the issue.
- 5.7 If, due to exceptional circumstances, an investigation exceeds the 15 working day window, the investigation manager will notify the Quality department and provide an adjusted timescale, so that this can be communicated to the complainant by the Quality Department.

6. **Complaint Appeals**

The complainant has the right to request an appeal of their complaint outcome. This must be requested by contacting the Quality department within a **10 working days period** of the dated response communication. All appeals will be assigned to a member of the College's Senior Leadership Team. All appeals will be responded to within **15 working days** in term time. This could take longer if the appeal is received in college holiday periods.

Once the appeals process has been completed CCG will issue a completion of Procedures letter to the complainant within 28 working days of the date of the appeal response

Responsibility of the College

The College will:

- acknowledge all formal complaints and aim to respond within a stated period of time;
- deal reasonably and sensitively with all complaints;
- take action where appropriate;
- welcome issues being brought to its attention to enable it to improve;
- take relevant action, where applicable, to change procedures or implement staff training to prevent recurrence of the complaint.

7. Responsibility of the Complainant

The complainant will be expected to:

- bring their complaint to the College's attention **within a reasonable time** of the reason for the complaint occurring;
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date;
- allow the College reasonable time to deal with the matter;
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond the College's control.

8. Appeals to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

- 8.1 If a Higher Education student has exhausted all steps contained within the College's Complaints Policy, and provided the complaint falls within the OIA's remit, they will be able to take their complaint to the OIA.
- 8.2 When making a complaint to the OIA, a Completion of Procedures letter will be required. Once the appeals process has been completed CCG will issue a completion of Procedures letter to the complainant within 28 working days of the date of the appeal response.
- 8.3 Any application to the OIA will need to be made within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.
- 8.4 The OIA cannot review complaints about academic judgment, admissions or student employment matters. As a classic ombudsman scheme, the OIA is a complaints handler of last resort.
- 8.5 Further details on how to make a complaint to the OIA can be found at the Office of the Independent Adjudicator website at www.oiahe.org.uk

Appendix 1 – Flowchart of complaints process and timeline

