

# Queens' College Cambridge

## Student Complaints Procedure

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The College welcomes comments and suggestions about the services it provides. Junior members are encouraged to communicate any causes for concern, either academic or non-academic, to the College. Where possible, students should first raise these concerns informally with the senior member or member of staff directly concerned, or by contacting the person in charge of the relevant department. In all such cases junior members are expected to exercise their duty of politeness to College staff at all times. If in doubt about where to direct an enquiry, or where it seems appropriate, students should contact their Tutor. The following guide may be helpful: students are expected to raise concerns about academic matters within the College's competence (supervision system) with their Director of Studies; routine non-academic concerns might include comments about individual study bedrooms (which should be directed to the Housekeeper), or a question about a College bill (which may be directed to the Financial Office), or issues about the Sportsground or Boathouse (which should be addressed to the Senior Treasurer of the College Union). Such matters are normally resolved quickly. Issues of common concern, and which affect the student body as a whole, may be raised through the JCR and MCR representatives on various College Committees: the Domus Committee, the Teaching Committee, the Safety Committee, the Steward's Committee and the Council of the College Union. All such representations will be taken seriously; many issues can be dealt with quickly and effectively in this manner, without recourse to formal procedure.
- 1.2 The present Complaints Procedure is for those more serious issues which fall beyond the scope of those outlined in 1.1 above or below in 1.3. It is intended for use only in those serious cases where no other formal procedures are available – it is not additional to other formal procedures. These are likely to concern the educational provision of the College as reflected in the conduct of senior members or the academic staff of the College, in failing properly to discharge their responsibilities to a student or students. The College recognises that it has a duty to provide fair and objective procedures for considering and resolving such issues, and to ensure that its procedures are free from partiality arising from personal or institutional conflict of interest or other sources of bias. *In formulating this procedure, the College expects students to exhaust all normal and informal channels for expressing their complaint – through their Tutor, their Director of Studies, a Fellow of the College, or the Senior Tutor for academic matters or the Senior Bursar for matters relating to College staff – before turning to the provisions outlined in the following paragraphs.* In raising possible issues of complaint, junior members will be aware of, and observe, their obligations as members of the College and the University. They have a responsibility not to waste resources on frivolous or vexatious complaints.

- 1.3 In raising a complaint about an aspect of the College's educational provision, students should be aware that some of those aspects are already served by existing formal procedures. These include:
- a) *College Discipline.* The College has devolved to the Tutors the responsibility for College discipline. Information about regulations and disciplinary procedures, including details of informal and formal hearings, codes of practice, punishments and appeals are available for consultation in Tutorial Office. These are outlined in the College's "Information and Regulations" document issued to all junior members.
  - b) *Harassment.* The College procedures in cases of harassment are available for consultation in the Tutorial Office. The College is committed to good practice in this field. At least two Tutors (at least one of whom is female) are designated Tutors who may be approached in matters concerning harassment if students do not wish to consult their own Tutor. Their names are available in the Tutorial Office.
  - c) *Academic Failure & The Review Committee.* Students who fail University examinations are normally required to withdraw. Further information and details of the procedures of the Review Committee are available in the Tutorial Office for consultation.
  - d) *University Examinations Appeals.* Students should be aware that a separate procedure exists for appealing to the University in a case where the student feels that he or she has been unfairly classified in a University examination. The University Registry circulates further information on examination appeals. Details can be consulted in the University's Statutes and Ordinances.
  - e) *Misuse of the Computer Network.* The College applies, through the Tutors, the University Regulations and Procedures concerning the use and misuse of the University's computer network. Copies of these regulations are available for consultation in the Tutorial Office.

The procedures outlined in this document are *not* designed to be additional to the procedures outlined in 1.3 (a-e) above. That is, the procedures herein contained cannot be used to appeal or review either decisions reached under any of the above mentioned procedures [1.3(a-e)], or any decisions reached under other formal procedures that the Governing Body may introduce from time to time to deal with specific matters. Criminal Offences and matters of College Policy are not subject to these procedures.

- 1.4 The Complaints. Procedure shall be confidential, save where the complaint must necessarily be disclosed to another person or body in order to investigate the complaint, in which case the individual making the complaint will be notified in advance that such disclosure is to be made. Students will not be prejudiced in any way by lodging a *bona fide* complaint.
- 1.5 The College will aim to ensure that any matter is investigated thoroughly and expeditiously, and where it is concluded that remedial action is required, that it is implemented without undue delay.

1.6 Any student who is considering bringing forward a complaint under the procedure detailed in section 2 below should first seek advice from their Tutor or Fellow of the College, and (if appropriate) from a member of the JCR or MCR.

## **2. Procedure: The Complaints Officer**

2.1 A complaint should initially be raised informally, in the matter outlined in 1.1 above. If this has not produced a satisfactory resolution, the student should write to the Complaints Officer, with a full statement of the complaint. (Care should be taken not to enter into written correspondence with the subject of any complaint). A senior Fellow, appointed annually by the Governing Body, will act as Complaints Officer, except where that complaint is specifically against that Fellow. In that event, the President should be informed in writing, and will appoint another Fellow of the College to act as Complaints Officer.

2.2 The Complaints Officer will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and aim to see the complainant, where possible, within 10 days of receiving the complaint, in order to discuss the issues and decide the best way to proceed. If the student so wishes, the Complaints Officer will proceed on the basis of written evidence or, in exceptional circumstances, on the basis of representations from a proxy who is a member of the College.

2.3 The student may choose to be accompanied by a nominated companion from among the College's membership, either junior or senior, at the initial meeting with the Complaints Officer and at any subsequent meeting. The same companion should attend all relevant meetings, where he or she will have the right to speak.

2.4 At all stages the Complaints Officer will endeavour to resolve the complaint informally. Should informal resolution prove impossible or inappropriate he or she will formally resolve the complaint.

2.5 At the initial meeting the Complaints Officer will discuss with the student whether she or she wishes to proceed with a formal complaint. If so, the Complaints Officer will:

- (a) Notify the student that he or she will investigate the complaint.
- (b) Inform the student of the steps he or she intends to take to investigate the complaint.
- (c) Inform the student of any other person whom he or she intends to notify about the complaint. (See 1.4 above.)
- (d) Discuss the time-scale for investigating the complaint.
- (e) Discuss the nature of the remedy the student is seeking.

2.6 The Complaints Officer will aim to investigate the complaint and notify the student of the results within 14 days of the first meeting with the student. In the event that this is not possible, the Complaints Officer will communicate the reason for the delay to the student.

2.7 After concluding the investigation, the Complaints Officer will notify the student in writing of the decision, and may arrange a meeting at which the student will be

notified of the decision, and of any action the College proposes to take. In rendering a decision, the Complaints Officer will also rule on whether the decision is, or is not, to be allowed appeal. In making that latter judgement, the Complaints Officer will take into account the seriousness of the complaint and/or the seriousness of the consequences to any individual of the remedies proposed.

2.8 Where a complaint is upheld, appropriate remedies may include one or more of the following:

- (a) Disciplinary or other appropriate action;
- (b) Financial compensation;
- (c) A written and/or verbal apology;
- (d) A change in practice or policy

It should be noted that the College's action may be limited in cases where the person subject to the complaint is not a member or employee of the College.

The Complaints Officer may also decide that a student shall recover reasonable expenses, if any, incurred in pursuing the complaint.

2.9 A complaint must normally be made within 3 months of the matters about which the complaint is made.

2.10 In the event that the complainant or, where he or she is a junior member of the College, the person subject to the complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, he or she may give notice, in writing, of intention to appeal within 14 days of receipt of the decision. If the Complaints Officer has rendered, as part of the decision, that the matter is not to be subject to appeal, only that part of the decision may be appealed. Written notice of intention to appeal should be addressed to the Complaints Officer.

### **3 Appeals: Complaints Review Committee**

3.1 The Complaints Review Committee shall consist of 3 members from a panel appointed annually by the Governing Body. The panel will normally include a member of the JCR and a member of the MCR. No member of the Committee shall have any interest in, or previous involvement with, the issue or complaint, and the panel members shall jointly decide which of its members will serve on each occasion and which will act as its Chair. All members of the Committee will be bound by strict confidentiality.

3.2 When receiving notice of any appeal the Complaints Officer will notify the panel of the Complaints Review Committee, who will:

- (a) Call a meeting of the Complaints Review Committee, to be held , whenever , possible, within 14 days, and appoint a Chair.
- (b) Make all documents relating to the case available to the Committee.
- (c) Inform both the student (and any person subject to the complaint) of the date and time of the meeting and of their right to be accompanied to the meeting by another member of College.

3.3 The Complaints Review Committee shall determine its own procedure, provided that both the complainant and any person subject to the complaint shall be allowed a full

and fair opportunity to make representations to the Committee. The Committee shall form its own judgement of the merits of the complaint after full and careful review of the case and in the light of the representations made by the parties.

3.4 The Committee shall have the power to confirm, rescind the original decision.

3.5 If the complainant or, where he or she is a member of the College, the person subject to the complaint is not satisfied with the decision of the Committee, the reasons should be put in writing to the President, who will review the case at his discretion.

3.6 In the case of all complaints, it may be open for the matter to be referred to the Visitor. Advice on the appropriate procedures in this regard may be obtained from the President.

#### **4. Monitoring and review**

4.1 The Complaints Officer shall keep a record of all complaints, including the nature of the complaint, the ethnic origin/identity and gender given by the complainant; the procedure followed in dealing with the complaint; the time taken to resolve the complaint; and the outcome of the complaint.

4.2 The Complaints Officer shall report to a meeting of the Governing Body once a year the profile of every complaint received, in all cases observing the principle of confidentiality outlined in 1.4

4.3 The Governing Body, in the presence of student representatives shall, once a year, review the adequacy of information, advice, guidance and support for students on making complaints; and the adequacy of understanding amongst Fellows, staff and students of the grounds on which a complaint might arise.