

Griffith College Dublin

Quality Assurance Policies, Procedures, Practices and Guidelines

Title:	Complaints Procedure for Learners ¹
Document No:	QA J4
Issue Version:	3.0
Issue Date:	8.04.05
Related Documents:	Learner Code of Conduct (QA J3) Learner Disciplinary Procedure (QAJ5) Academic Misconduct Procedure (QA J6) Appeals Procedure (QA E15)
Circulated for comment to:	Academic & Professional Council
Effective From:	September 2005
Responsible for Implementation:	Quality Assurance Officer
Next Review:	August 2012
Modified:	
	Reviewed August 2006. Reviewed August 2011, replaced 'student' with 'learner', 'course' with 'programme' as per current norms.

¹ This procedure incorporates Nottingham Trent University's Complaints Procedure for Learners

1. Objective

- 1.1 To inform learners of how to go about communicating (informally and formally) any issues they may experience whilst a learner of the College.

2. Scope

- 2.1 It is important to note that separate procedures exist for the following circumstances:

2.1.1 All academic matters relating to examination and assessment performance and outcomes are covered by the Appeals Procedure (QA E15) and Academic Misconduct Policy (QA J6)

3. Responsibilities

- 3.1 Learner
- 3.2 Quality Assurance Officer
- 3.3 Director of Academic Programmes
- 3.4 Programme Directors
- 3.5 Department Managers
- 3.6 College staff
- 3.7 Complaints Hearing Panel

4. Introduction

- 4.1 The College aims to identify and quickly resolve any difficulties which may be experienced by a learner or a cohort of learners during the programme of their studies
- 4.2 Ongoing feedback, whether formal or informal, is actively sought throughout the year by a number of means. Amongst the methods of feedback available to learners are:
- 4.2.1 Discussion with faculty members
 - 4.2.2 Programme Committee Meetings
 - 4.2.3 Class representative meetings
 - 4.2.4 Learner feedback questionnaires (e.g. module delivery and facilities)
 - 4.2.5 The Student Support e-mail address (studentsupport@gcd.ie)
- 4.3 The College fully accepts that circumstances may lead to the necessity for this Complaints Procedure for Learners to be enacted, however, it hopes that learners will first avail of one of the means of articulating feedback identified

above to ensure that any issue arising can be dealt with at source and at the most beneficial time

- 4.4 In the exceptional event that an issue remains unresolved at this level, this procedure describes how learners can bring on-going matters of concern about their learning experience to the attention of the College and enable investigation of those concerns
- 4.5 This procedure aims to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved, with informal resolution an option at any point.

5. Right of Attendance and Representation at a Complaints Hearing

- 5.1 In section 7 below reference is made to the learner / staff right to attend and be represented at a complaints hearing. The following points are relevant:
 - 5.1.1 A learner or staff member who is a party to a complaints proceeding has the right to attend the hearing convened for the purpose of adjudicating the complaint, to be represented, to hear the evidence presented, to challenge the evidence on cross-examination and to present his / her own evidence
 - 5.1.2 A representative at a hearing may be a fellow learner / staff member, a relative, a friend, an adviser or a legal representative²
 - 5.1.3 A representative may speak on behalf of the learner / staff member
 - 5.1.4 A learner or staff member may choose to be accompanied by a translator provided by the College or to appoint a translator of their choosing³
 - 5.1.5 A learner or staff member who chooses not to be represented shall be requested at the hearing to confirm in writing that he /she has been informed of his / her right of representation and has declined to exercise it
 - 5.1.6 If a learner or staff member fails to attend the hearing, the hearing shall proceed in the absence of the learner or staff member.

6. Conditions re: Complaints Procedure for Learners

² Any costs associated with legal representation of the learner or staff member shall be borne by the learner or the staff member respectively, unless the Complaints Hearing Panel so otherwise determines.

³ Any costs associated with the appointment of a translator by the learner or staff member (other than one provided by the College) shall be borne by the learner or the staff member respectively, unless the Complaints Hearing Panel so otherwise determines.

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6.1 Third Party Complaints

6.1.1 No investigation of a complaint made on behalf of a learner shall be undertaken without that learner's written agreement to the concerns raised and written consent for an investigation to be carried out

6.2 Complaints to the College President and Other Senior Members of Staff

6.2.1 Should a complaint be received directly by the President's Office, or the Office of any Senior Manager, it shall be acknowledged and referred to the Quality Assurance Officer who shall ensure that it enters the Procedure at the appropriate point. If no attempt has been made by the complainant to resolve the complaint locally, the complainant shall be advised by the Quality Assurance Officer to first seek resolution through Part I of the Formal Procedure or through one of the means identified in 4.2

6.3 Vexatious or Malicious Complaints

6.3.1 The College may consider invoking the Learner Disciplinary Procedure (QA J5) in those cases where complaints are found to be vexatious or malicious. A vexatious or malicious complaint is defined as a complaint which is patently unsustainable, having been put forward so as to abuse the process of the Complaints Procedure for Learners, or, for example, to attempt to defame the name or character of another person

6.4 Complaints made by Learners under the Age of 18

6.4.1 If a complaint is made under the Formal Procedure (see section 7 below) by a learner who is under the age of 18, the College shall notify the parents or guardians of the learner in writing, and keep them informed of the progress of the complaint, unless it is the learner's express wish that this should not be done. The College shall permit the parents or guardians of the learners to act on the learner's behalf during the process, provided the learner has confirmed agreement in writing beforehand

6.5 Group Complaints

6.5.1 Where a complaint is brought by a group of learners, one person should be prepared to identify him / herself as spokesperson and correspondent for the purposes of the Formal Procedure (see section 7 below), and each member of the group must be able to demonstrate that he / she has been personally affected by the matter which is the subject of the complaint. In addition, all complainants must agree in writing to the spokesperson acting on his / her behalf.

7. Complaints Procedure

7.1 Formal Procedure: Part I

7.1.1 It is anticipated that most complaints can be resolved through direct contact between the learner and the Department / Faculty or Service. This being the case, resolution should be sought by the learner first from the Department / Faculty /Service in which the complaint arose, by expressing the complaint to the most appropriate member of staff (e.g. Department Manager, Year Head, Programme Director, Service Manager etc.). A learner should normally expect to receive a written or verbal response within ten working days.

7.2 Formal Procedure: Part II

7.2.1 If the response to the complaint is not considered by the learner to be satisfactory, he/she may invoke Part II of the Formal Procedure by completing the Learner Complaint Form (attached as Appendix I), and submitting it to the Quality Assurance Officer. The form should detail the learner's grounds for complaint. The learner should include a statement of what has been done by the learner to attempt resolution within the relevant Department, Faculty or Service and why he/she feels that action taken by the Department, Faculty or Service following notification of the complaint has been inadequate. The Quality Assurance Officer shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint form within five working days

7.2.2 The Quality Assurance Officer shall attempt resolution at this stage either by correspondence between the parties, negotiation with the Department Manager, Year Head, Programme Director, Service Manager or other senior members of staff, or facilitation of a conciliation meeting between the learner concerned (who may be represented as indicated in section 5 above) and the Department / Faculty / Service. The circumstances of the complaint shall dictate which of these methods is considered most likely to result in a resolution of the complaint to the satisfaction of the learner. Should a complaint concern services related to the work of the Quality Assurance Officer the Director of Academic Programmes shall assign a senior manager to oversee the Formal Procedure.

7.2.3 It is anticipated that Part II of the Formal Procedure would normally be completed, with a response in writing from the Quality Assurance Officer, within one calendar month of the receipt date of the completed Learner Complaint Form. The Quality Assurance Officer shall keep all parties informed of progress and the reason for any delay in proceedings if applicable.

7.3 Formal Procedure: Part III (Appeal Stage)

- 7.3.1 If the response to the complaint following completion of Part II of this procedure is not considered by the learner to be satisfactory, he/she may invoke Part III (Appeal Stage) of the Formal Procedure by a request in writing, within ten working days from the date of the notification of the outcome of the correspondence, negotiation or meeting referred to in Part II. The request should be addressed to the Quality Assurance Officer outlining why the outcome of Part II is felt to be unsatisfactory. Taking into account the substance of the complaint and the previous attempts at resolution the case shall be referred to a Complaint Hearing Panel
- 7.3.2 The Complaint Hearing Panel shall be formed by the Director of Academic Programmes, on behalf the APC, and shall be chaired by a Programme Director or a Department Manager from outside the Faculty or Department in which the learner is enrolled (in the case of a complaint about a programme related matter), or a Head of Service / Department from another service area (in the case of a complaint about a service). The Panel shall consist of two other members of academic or support staff, drawn from Faculties, Departments or Services unrelated to the complaint, and a representative from the Learners' Union. A minute taker shall be assigned to the Panel. The Panel shall inform the Quality Assurance Officer when its formation and composition has been defined. (Notes for Guidance on the conduct of a Complaint Hearing are attached as Appendix II)
- 7.3.3 If the complaint relates to the actions of an individual member of staff, rather than the Faculty, Department or Service, that individual has the right to be informed of the substance of the complaint and to attend and be represented (as indicated in section 5)
- 7.3.4 The Complaint Hearing Panel shall meet, normally within ten working days of the referral from Part II and, following a period of reflection, communicate its conclusions to the learner and the Faculty, Department or Service normally within 15 working days. The Quality Assurance Officer shall keep all parties informed of progress and shall explain reasons for any necessary extension of the timescale, for example, if an adjournment in the proceedings is necessary.

8. Outcomes of the Complaints Procedure for Learners

- 8.1 Any conclusions and recommendations shall be communicated in writing to the complainant and the relevant Service, Department or Faculty. A summarised version of Part II and III outcomes shall be made available to the next Academic & Professional Council meeting under reserved business

- 8.2 Should a complaint be upheld, the Quality Assurance Officer or the Chair of the Complaint Hearing Panel may make recommendations to the Programme Director, Department Manager or Head of Service and relevant members of the Senior Management Team. Recommendations may also be made to College committees in respect of quality assurance procedures or policies
- 8.3 It is the responsibility of the Department, Faculty or Service to act on the recommendations made by the Complaint Hearing Panel
- 8.4 In a case where a complaint has been made against an individual staff member and been upheld, the College President or a nominee may invoke the relevant staff disciplinary procedure.
- 8.5 If a complaint is not upheld, the complainant shall be informed in writing with reasons for its rejection.

9. Confidentiality

- 9.1 Complaints shall be handled sensitively and with due consideration to confidentiality for both learners and staff. Any person named in a complaint shall be informed of the substance of the complaint and shall have the right to reply as part of the investigation. Information contained within the complaint shall be made available only to those members of staff involved in its resolution. The Programme Director, Department Head or Head of Service shall also be informed of the complaint.

10. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

- 10.1 A report on each case which comes before the Complaint Hearing Panel shall be prepared by the Quality Assurance Officer for the Director of Academic Programmes and the Quality Assurance Office to assist in monitoring the effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure and to identify relevant quality assurance issues
- 10.2 The Complaints Procedure for Learners is part of the College's quality assurance procedures. Complaints are considered useful feedback and, where appropriate, shall be used to facilitate improvements to services and facilities. This shall be achieved by annual reporting through Programme Reviews and Departmental Reviews as appropriate to ensure that outcomes and recommendations arising from the Formal Procedure are actioned.



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COMPLAINTS FORM FOR LEARNERS

This form is to be completed under Part II of the Formal Procedure detailed in the Complaints Procedure for Learners (QA J4). Advice on completion of the form can be obtained from the Quality Assurance Officer. PLEASE COMPLETE IN BLOCK CAPITALS OR TYPE.

PERSONAL DETAILS

Full Name:

Student Number:

Programme & Stage:

Address for Correspondence in connection with the complaint (in the case of a group complaint, please attach a list of complainants on a separate sheet of paper):

Contact Telephone Number:

OUTLINE OF COMPLAINT

[2 of 3]

Please Note: As part of the investigation of your complaint, any member of staff mentioned in this form shall be made aware of the complaint, as shall the Head of the Department, Faculty or Service involved.

If you have written a formal letter of complaint to anyone else in the College please indicate names and dates.

Please attach additional sheets to this form if necessary.

Please provide an outline of the complaint, including dates of actions:

Please explain what steps you have taken, together with dates, to resolve your complaint locally as per the Formal Procedure I:

Please explain why you are dissatisfied with the response you have received from the Faculty, Department or Service:

Please indicate, in your opinion, what response would have best resolved your complaint:

DECLARATION

I declare that the information provided in this form is true and that I would be willing to answer further questions relating to it if requested.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix II: Guidance on the Conduct of a Complaint Hearing

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Complaint Hearing shall be to hear both the complaint and the response. Taking into account previous attempts to resolve issues the Complaint Hearing Panel shall determine whether the learner's complaint is justified and whether the Department, Faculty or Service has provided a reasonable response or resolution.

2. Documentation

- 2.1 The Complaint Hearing Panel shall have access to all previous documentation in connection with the complaint, in addition, the complainant and the Department, Faculty, Service are each asked to produce an A4 synopsis of their case for distribution during the programme of the Hearing to the Panel and the other party
- 2.2 Other documentary evidence may be tabled at the discretion of the Chair.

3. Process

- 3.1 A Complaint Hearing shall be convened by the Director of Academic Programmes following a request in writing by the learner who has brought the complaint, as Part II of the Formal Procedure of the Complaints Procedure for Learners
- 3.2 The Complaint Hearing Panel shall be chaired by a Programme Director or a Department Manager from outside the Faculty or Department in which the learner is enrolled (in the case of a complaint about a programme related matter), or a Service Department Manager from another service area (in the case of a complaint about a service). The Panel shall consist of two other members of academic or support staff, drawn from Faculties, Departments or services unrelated to the complaint, and a representative from the Learners' Union. A minute taker shall be assigned to the Panel. The Panel shall inform the Quality Assurance Officer when its formation and composition has been defined.
- 3.3 The learner and staff member shall be entitled to be represented as detailed in section 5 of the Complaints Procedure for Learners (QA J4)
- 3.4 The Order of Proceedings at a Complaints Hearing is as follows:
 - 3.4.1 Introduction of those present

- 3.4.2 Outline of the purpose of the Complaint Hearing
- 3.4.3 Reference to any witness statements by complainant and /or Department, Faculty, Service
- 3.4.4 An A4 synopsis summarising the main points of their case shall be distributed by both parties
- 3.4.5 Complainant and/or representative presentation shall follow (approx. 15 minutes/max. 20 minutes)
- 3.4.6 The Panel and Department, Faculty, Service shall be given the opportunity to question complainant's and / or representative's presentation
- 3.4.7 Faculty/Service/ Department presentation (approx. 15 minutes/max. 20 minutes)
- 3.4.8 The Panel and the complainant and / or representative shall be given the opportunity to question the Department, Faculty or Service's presentation
- 3.4.9 The Complainant and/or representative shall sum up (5 minutes) [new evidence is not admissible at this time]
- 3.4.10 The Department, Faculty or Service shall sum up (5 minutes) [new evidence is not admissible at this time]
- 3.4.11 The Complaints Hearing Panel shall adjourn and consider its submission in private
- 3.4.12 Either side may be required to be available to provide further information or clarification of matters to the Complaints Hearing Panel.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4.1 At the end of the process, and following a period of reflection, the Complaint Hearing Panel will come to a conclusion, and, if appropriate, make recommendations to the Department, Faculty or Service.
- 4.2 Any conclusions and/or recommendations shall be communicated in writing to the complainant and the Faculty, Department, Service within the specified time scale and submitted to the next Academic & Professional Council meeting.