



London College of Business Studies

COMPLAINT PROCEDURE & POLICY

Published Date: 01st September 2012

Final Review Date: October 2018

Next Review Due: September 2019

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1. Introduction

LCBS Complaints Policy and Procedure is designed to help our learners to raise issues, problems or complaints and to obtain a speedy response from the College to resolve any complaints.

This policy is formulated in accordance with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – with specific reference to Chapter B9 Complaints and Appeals.

Integral to LCBS approach to monitoring and enhancing all aspects of its operation are students' views. The views of students are welcome and the College believes that students should be provided with the opportunity to express concerns about all aspects of the College operation through providing feedback or making a complaint.

Definition of a Complaint

The College defines a complaint as:

“The expression of a specific concern about the provision of a course/ module, or a programme of study, or a related academic service.”

The College also has a separate **Appeals Procedure** which is concerned with a specific request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with decisions of student progression, assessment and awards. This procedure is incorporated within the Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy and the Programme/Student handbook.

Communicating our Complaints Policy

Information about our complaints Policy is widely available through:

- College's website
- Student Portal
- The Student/Programme Handbook
- The Staff Handbook
- Student Representatives meetings

Students and staff are also informed about the Complaints Policy at:

- Staff induction and at the start of the academic year.
- Student induction to their course.
- At Student Representative meetings.

Senior staff are reminded of their responsibility to deal effectively with complaints through the staff review process.

The Scope of our Complaints Policy

Our Complaints Procedure can be used by:

- individuals applying to the college;
- current students; and

- students who completed their course or left the college within the previous three months.

Our Complaint Procedure covers situations where a student has a serious complaint concerning:

- the conduct of a member of staff towards him or her;
- the delivery of a programme upon which he or she is enrolled, which cannot be resolved by informal processes; or
- a service provided by our College which cannot be resolved by informal processes.
- A student who has failed the initial assessment or not granted admission to college for any other relevant reason and wants the College to review the decision/outcome.

Our Complaint Procedure does not cover:

- appeals against the decision of Assessment Boards – see Appeals Procedure within Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy;
- complaints against the Students' Representative Body
- appeals against decisions taken under disciplinary proceeding; see Disciplinary Procedure
- complaints about the behaviour of other students;
- appeals against the decision of Investigating Panels; or
- Complaints that relate to a matter of academic judgment.

General Principles

We recognise that complaints need to be resolved well and we have put in place processes that support and expect people to act reasonably and fairly towards each other, and treat the processes themselves with respect and not abuse them. We will:

- Have fair, effective and timely procedures for dealing with complaints and to ensure confidentiality (unless disclosure is necessary to enable the complaint to be progressed).
- Ensure our complaints procedure is overseen and reviewed by senior staff.
- Encourage regular feedback and ensure that all students have the opportunity to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage.
- Ensure our complaints procedure is publicly accessible at all times and that it can be easily understood by all our students and staff.
- Implement our complaints procedure with regards to any applicable law(s).
- Ensure that appropriate action is taken following a complaint (whether informal or formal).
- Make provision available to support and guide any persons complaining – including provision for persons being accompanied at any stage, including formal hearings.

- Have in place effective arrangements to monitor, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of our complaints procedures and to reflect on the outcomes to make future improvements and learn from lessons.
- Provide suitable briefings and support for all staff and students involved in handling or supporting a complaint.

2. Complaints process and timeframe

Before submitting a complaint, students are advised to consider whether the matter is a concern/ feedback or a complaint and whether there are other more suitable ways for them to express their concerns. For example, this may be through discussion with the Course Tutor, the Programme Leader, Student Welfare Officer, Academic Resource Manager, and through their Student Representative for their class and through the course feedback surveys. A student may also make use of the Suggestion Box available at the College for the concern.

The College will deal with concerns and complaints in a manner proportionate to the complexity of the matter and would encourage informal proceedings to be used wherever possible in the first instance – unless there is a serious complaint.

Our complaints procedure allows for an informal complaint to move to a Stage 2 Formal Complaint where appropriate, and a student can be supported by the Student Welfare Officer to move to a formal complaint procedure.

Stage One - Informal Complaints Procedure

Students are advised to consider the different ways in which they can provide feedback or express concern about issues that can more effectively and efficiently be dealt with through the College informal avenues and on-going student feedback processes. The college regularly seeks the views of its students through:

- The Student Representatives meeting with Academic and Administrative Staff which covers areas all areas of the curriculum, standards, facilities etc.
- Mid and End of course unit feedback - a formal feedback form on each unit which is completed in the middle and at the end of the course assessment each semester.
- One-to-one feedback and discussion between the teaching/admin staff and students.

Deciding on whether a complaint can be dealt with informally or formally may also depend on the nature of the complaint and how the complainant would like the issue to be resolved. At each stage the person investigating the complaint will make sure they:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved.
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
- Meet the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary).
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
- Interview those involved in the matter and/ or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of the interview.

At each stage in the procedure the College will also bear in mind the ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology.
- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An assurance that the event complained about will not recur.
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again.
- An undertaking to review the College policies/ practices in light of the complaint.

The outcome of a complaint – both informal and formal, is given to the student in writing. The outcome is also monitored and reviewed as part of the review and quality management processes.

Before a student raises a formal complaint they are encouraged to seek the advice of the Student Representatives Panel. All students are encouraged to attempt to resolve their complaint informally and conciliate on the issue with the member of staff most directly concerned before submitting a formal complaint.

If a student does not want to contact their tutor or other member of staff concerned with their complaint, the student can contact the college Student Welfare Officer who is the person responsible for the co-ordination of student complaint procedure.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with the complaint, the Student Welfare Officer will consider referring the complaint to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior – but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

If a student believes that the complaint cannot be resolved through conciliation with the member of staff/ Student Welfare Officer - or if they wish to proceed directly to a formal complaint then the student/ complainant can complete the Complaint Form and return it to the Student Welfare Officer and proceed to the formal complaints process. The Student Welfare Officer will help the student to complete the complaint form if required.

Complaints or review requests by individuals applying to the College will need to be dealt with in accordance with the nature of the complaint or review request. If the individual wants to get the marks or scores recounted then such a request may be approved. Review of scores/performance in objective/multiple choice questions do not attract a right of appeal or review as these are straightforward responses. In case of review of marks in English Writing sections, a request may be approved depending on the quality of the submission. Another assessor may review the assessment and award marks to establish that the original marks awarded were correct. The Head of Administration/Head of Academics may wish to review the request if required.

Stage Two - Formal Complaint Procedure

Throughout our complaints procedure we will ensure:

- Confidentiality at the informal stage.
- Accessibility of information.
- Clarity of procedure.
- A staged approach with specified times and an informal and formal stage.

- Advice and support in using the procedure.
- Stated response times.
- Resolution at local level wherever possible.
- Entitlement to have a well-founded and documented formal complaint heard.
- Every effort made by the College to prevent victimisation of a student who has made a complaint.

The stages of the student complaints procedure are designed to provide a response to the complaint at the earliest feasible opportunity. Students are made aware of the importance of keeping a note of the discussions they have at each stage and the dates on which they take place.

When making an informal or formal complaint, students are advised to keep copies of relevant documents. Additionally, they may wish to have the support of a friend, who could accompany them to meetings when their complaint is discussed. This is particularly important when the student is making a formal complaint as the complaint form requires specific information and evidence if possible to back up their complaint. The Student Welfare Officer can also provide support in completing the forms and in accompanying students to a formal hearing of their complaint if required.

The College requires that the student making the complaint must be present at any formal hearing or panel review. The student can be supported but cannot be represented in their absence. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the student may be accompanied by legal representation unless this had been discussed and agreed with the College beforehand.

Staff will need to make use of this policy to handle complaints. Staff are briefed in how the informal stages of complaints relate to formal stages – and the processes and opportunities available to students to provide feedback.

Staff should keep notes of meetings and outcomes of discussions with complainants. They should also be aware and act according to the limits to their authority - any outcome of a complaint that results in a decision or changes must be agreed with senior management or the College Principal.

Where a member of staff is the subject of the complaint they will be able to seek support from a colleague and will also be invited to have a colleague present at any formal hearing of a complaint against them. The relevant line Manager may also be involved to provide support where appropriate.

The outcome of a complaint - both informal and formal – is given to the student in writing. The letter will confirm the completion of proceedings, with the decision/ outcome reached and the reason for reaching the decision.

A formal complaint will be reviewed by an appropriate senior member of staff which will be the Head of Administration or the Head of Academics depending on the nature of the complaint. The Principal may be the most appropriate senior person in some circumstances. If having made a formal complaint the student is happy with the outcome the process will be complete and a formal record of the complaint will be filed and any resulting action will be monitored and reviewed.

If at any time a student makes a formal complaint to the police or takes other legal action at the same time they use this procedure, then no further investigation by the College using this procedure will be undertaken. The complainant and the College must adhere to any matters relating to the Law and any breaches of the Law will be dealt with by the appropriate authority. The formal complaints procedure should not be confused with 'whistle-blowing'. The College has a 'whistle-blowing policy and procedure where it is appropriate to use this.

Stage Three - Complaint Panel

If it is not possible to resolve a complaint satisfactorily at the highest level within the College (by the relevant Department Head), then a Complaints Panel will be set up to deal with the complaint.

The Complaints Panel will normally consist of the Head of Administration, the Head of Academics and the College Principal. If required, a member of the board of trustees may also be involved.

If the complaint still cannot be resolved to a satisfactory conclusion then the student will be advised that the procedure within the College has been exhausted and the matter for the College is closed. The student will be advised that the only course of action left for the complainant is to contact the Office of the Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

Timeframes

Informal Stage of Complaint

Wherever possible we would encourage an informal complaint to be dealt with immediately and encourage the complainant to discuss the matter with the person directly involved or the Student Welfare Officer. It is possible that if the complaint requires a simple response it can be dealt with **within 24 hours**.

If the complaint is not raised immediately then an informal complaint should be raised within **2 Weeks** of the initial cause for concern.

The College commits to respond and to provide a written record of the outcome to the complaint within **2 Weeks**.

If the initial discussion about the complaint does not lead to a satisfactory outcome then:

- The student can take the issue to one or more of the following appropriate contacts: the Student Welfare Officer, the Head of Administration, or the Head of Academics.
- Where the outcome of the complaint is satisfactory, the student will receive a written statement of a satisfactory outcome within **2 Weeks**.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved within **2 Weeks** and, if having discussed the complaint through in a confidential manner, there is still not a satisfactory outcome then students are advised to use the formal complaint procedure.

Formal Stage of Complaint

A formal complaint should be made no later than **one calendar month** after the initial concern/problem/ incident. A formal complaint is made using the formal complaints form. Hard copies are available from the Student Welfare Officer or at the reception. The form is also available on line through the website. If the student has not already used the informal complaint process they are advised to consult with their tutor, the Student Welfare Officer, a friend or a Student Representative before completing the form.

The completed form should be sent (by email if possible), marked 'Confidential Complaint', to the Head of Administration or Head of Academics. If a complaint is directed at a named member or members of staff, he/she/they will be advised of the complaint and invited to respond. At this point it will no longer be possible for the complainant to remain anonymous. The student will receive a response within **2 Weeks**.

Complaints Panel

If the issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Department Head then a Complaints Panel will be convened within **2 Weeks** of the formal response being given to the student. The Panel members will be represented by senior staff including the Head of Administration and the Head of Academics - with an independent chair which would normally be the College Principal.

The student will be invited to the panel to discuss the matter further. If a resolution is reached at the Panel, the student will receive a written response, detailing the outcome within **1 week**.

3. Monitoring and Evaluating

LCBS is committed to continuously improving its service to students and to raising standards throughout the college. Taking account of feedback and complaints is a very important and effective way of making changes that can result in a positive contribution to the College quality assurance and enhancement framework. Monitoring and evaluation will also help the College ensure that the complaints procedure is working effectively. The College will record, monitor and evaluate the feedback and complaints received and the action taken.

The Student Welfare Officer will collect and collate information for all complaints (informal and formal) at all stages.

Informal complaints raised through the Student Representative meetings will not record individual student data but a record of the issues raised and the action taken as a result of the issue(s) will be monitored and reviewed. Records are kept and the outcome of action is fed back to the next meeting of the Student Representatives.

For other individual student informal or formal complaint where the Student Welfare Officer has a record of the complaint and is aware of the name of the student concerned, data will be kept regarding the number of complaints made by:

- students in year one or year two of their studies;
- the course of the student;
- the gender and ethnicity of those making a complaint;
- whether those students making a complaint had a disability;

- the age profile of the complainant(s);
- the number of complaints made by international students, students from EU communities other than the UK, and UK students.

The Student Welfare Officer will produce a summary report at the end of each semester (three times a year). The summary report will be seen and reviewed by the senior management team (Principal, Head of Administration and Head of Academics). An end of year report will also be produced for the ACCR as part of its review of provision and forward planning.

The college will publicise to all staff and students information from summary reports of the complaints and feedback. This will help raise awareness of the procedures themselves and will enhance the confidence of students and staff of the transparency and effectiveness of the college complaints procedures.