



THAMES
COLLEGE
BERKSHIRE

Student Complaints Procedure

This document is essential
for staff to read and keep for
future reference.

Reviewed by Thames College Berkshire
Management in March 2010
Next Review Date April 2011

73. Student Complaints Procedure

SCOPE

This procedure applies to complaints made by current Thames College Berkshire students, or leavers within 3 months of the date of their graduation or withdrawal (the Student Officer may accept complaints beyond this period if exceptional circumstances apply), in respect of:

- the delivery and/or management of an academic module or programme, or supervised study;
- any services provided by academic, administrative or support services (unless provided by institutions other than Thames College Berkshire who will operate to their own Complaints Procedure).

This procedure does not apply to complaints relating to:

- general comments/suggestions – these can be made anonymously by filling out a Comments/Suggestions Slip and placing it in the Comments/Suggestions Box at reception;
- suspected professional malpractice (if it is established that misconduct of staff or students has occurred which is governed by other disciplinary procedures or external legal systems, then these procedures will be invoked and the complaint will not be dealt with under the student complaints procedure);
- any suspected potential breach of criminal law.

PRINCIPLES

1. Thames College Berkshire is committed to providing the best possible experience for its students in a high quality learning environment, and will do everything in its power to help students to resolve any reasonable complaint.
2. The expectation is that the vast majority of complaints raised by students will be answered or resolved quickly and informally by direct contact between the student and the relevant department/section, without recourse to the more formal processes prescribed by this Procedure.
3. If any student feels they have reasonable grounds for complaint, they should not be hindered in making a complaint. All parties should act without bias or prejudice, with the objective of establishing the true facts of the case and coming to a reasonable and just resolution, which is relevant and proportionate to the complaint. Complaints should be dealt with in a timely manner, and complainants should be kept informed of the progress of the investigation at every stage.
4. Any student seeking guidance on how to make a complaint should have easy access to timely and accurate advice. Such advice is available from the Student Officer, whose contact details are provided at the end of this document.

5. No student will be victimized for making a complaint in good faith, and all reasonable complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with according to the agreed procedures. If it is established that a complaint is frivolous or spurious, then it will not be considered reasonable. *The College may take disciplinary action against a student making such a complaint.*
6. The College will deal with all complaints confidentially, and expects all parties involved (including the complainant) to honour this approach. Unless there are exceptional considerations, any person who is the subject of a complaint has the right to be supplied with a copy of the complaint, and to comment on it.
7. The College will not use this procedure for complaints made anonymously. (General comments and suggestions can be made anonymously via the Comments/Suggestions Box, but are not appropriate for this procedure.)

TIMESCALES

Any initial complaint should be submitted to the relevant staff member as soon as possible after the cause of the complaint and normally within 3 months of the issue giving rise to a complaint unless there is some valid reason for the delay.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, the following timescales will apply in this procedure:

- Members of staff will acknowledge receipt of any formal complaint within two working days
- Members of staff will investigate and issue a response to any *formal* complaint within ten working days
- Where a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of any stage, they will have a maximum of 10 working days in which to request progress to the next stage of the procedure

PROCEDURE

The complaints process comprises four stages:

Informal Stage

If you have a complaint you should, in the first instance, contact the member of staff who is most immediately relevant to the matter in hand. If you are not sure who to approach, or you feel unable to approach the relevant person directly, then you should speak to the Student Officer who will be able to advise you where to go for help in making your complaint and will also have the discretion, in exceptional cases, to immediately advance the complaint to the first or, exceptionally, second stage (see below).

First Stage

If you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint from the relevant member of staff, you should complain formally, by filling out a Student Complaints Form, addressed to the appropriate

Course Leader, officer or staff with relevant operational responsibility (if you are unsure who to write to, the Student Officer can advise). You should indicate that it is a first stage complaint on the "Stage of Complaint" section. You can pick up a Student Complaints form from reception, and hand it to the receptionist when it is completed, who will pass it on to the relevant member of staff. This person should issue a written acknowledgement of your complaint, normally within 2 working days, and let you know who is going to deal with the matter.

The complaint will then be investigated by the relevant individual or their nominee and you should be sent a written report of their findings within 10 working days from receipt of the complaint. Occasionally, the investigator may need to contact you to clarify matters of fact.

If, having received the report, you feel that your complaint has still not been resolved satisfactorily, then you may progress to the second formal stage of the complaint procedure.

Second Stage

You should complete a Student Complaints Form and submit it to the Student Officer within 10 working days of the receiving the investigator's letter at the end of the first stage. On this form you should indicate that it is a second stage complaint on the "Stage of Complaint" section. You should provide details of the:

- reason(s) for complaint
- evidence to support the complaint (please attached any relevant documents)
- action(s) taken so far to resolve the issue
- desired resolution(s) of issue(s)
- your name(s) and contact details¹

¹If you are one of several students who wish to make the same complaint, then only one form should be completed, and you should nominate from amongst the list of complainants one person to act as your spokesperson.

The Student Officer will acknowledge receipt of the complaint form, normally within 2 working days. If the Student Officer feels that the first stage of the procedures has not been followed correctly then they will advise you how to do this. Otherwise, the Student Officer will instigate an investigation to establish the facts of the case. If, in the light of this investigation, the Student Officer deems the complaint to be frivolous or spurious then they will close their investigation (should this happen you may appeal against this decision to the Principal who can over-rule the Student Officer and require that the complaint move forward to the second stage).

If the Student Officer considers that the complaint is valid then they will nominate a member of the College Complaints Panel to investigate the matter (the Panel comprises the other senior staff of the College – Principal, Course Leaders – representing a wide range of expertise and knowledge). You will be informed who will be dealing with your complaint and the expected time-scale for the investigation.

You will have the right to a personal hearing with the person investigating the complaint. You are entitled to be accompanied to this hearing by another member of the College (for example, a Thames College Berkshire student representative, your college tutor etc). The Student Officer will be present at this hearing and will keep a record of proceedings.

There will then be a formal complaints hearing, where you will have the opportunity to present your case. The department/person against whom the complaint is being raised is also entitled to be present at this hearing, and have their views heard. All information used by the investigating panelist to reach a decision will be shared with both parties, so that they can contest or clarify the information.

Once the investigation is complete, the panelist will write to you, normally within 5 working days of the hearing, with details of their findings and what they have recommended for the outcome.

Final Stage

If, at the end of the second stage, you are still not satisfied, then you should then write to the Student Officer to request progression to the final stage, that of formal review.

You must make a request for review within 10 working days of receiving details of the outcome of the second stage of the complaints procedure.

Normally a formal review will take place only if you:

- produce new or additional evidence which was not, for a valid reason, available in the earlier stage of the procedure and which might have influenced the outcome;

and/or

- can demonstrate that the earlier stages of the complaints procedure were not followed correctly.

If the Student Officer considers that there is no ground for review, then you will be informed in writing that your complaint will not be taken further and given the reasons for this.

If the Student Officer considers that there is a valid reason for a formal review, then they will refer your case to the Principal for review.

After the review is complete, the Principal will write to you detailing their findings and (if appropriate) what actions will be taken. The decision of the Principal is final.

CONTACT DETAILS

Our Student Officer is:

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Email:

Principal

Comments/Suggestions Slip

Area/Department about which you are making a comment/suggestion:

What is your comment/suggestion?

Date: _____

Student Complaints Form – First/Second Stage

Name: _____

Email: _____

Name of Person whom the complaint is against: _____

Stage of Complaint (First or Second): _____

Date: _____

Reason(s) for Complaint: _____

Evidence to support the complaint (if you have it). Please list any documents here and attach them to this form:

Action(s) taken so far to resolve the issue(s): _____

Desired resolution(s) of issue(s): _____

Student Complaints Form – Final Stage

Name: _____

Email: _____

Name of Person whom the complaint is against: _____

Date: _____

New or additional evidence to support the complaint (if applicable). Please list any documents here and attach them to this form:

Explanation of how earlier stages were not followed properly (if applicable):

Student Complaints Procedure – Flowchart

