

## Dealing with Complaints from Students

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**Review Date:** Michaelmas 2016

**Committee Ownership:** Academic Policy

### Overview

This document sets out the procedure for making a complaint about the College. This has two stages: an informal procedure, and a formal complaints procedure. Guidance is also given on matters falling outside the complaints procedure or for which there is supplementary provision.

The College recognises that it has a duty to provide fair and objective procedures for examining and resolving complaints, and to ensure that its procedures are free from partiality arising from personal or institutional conflict of interest or other sources of bias. No student will be disadvantaged by having raised a complaint in good faith, even if it is not upheld, but the College may take disciplinary action against a student making frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints.

If you are considering making a complaint, you may wish to seek help or advice from the persons listed in Appendix 1. Complaints about matters covered by any of the College's other published policies that set out independent complaints procedures (e.g. Dignity at Work & Study, Academic Review) should be pursued under those procedures in the first instance. Complaints about matters of general policy must of course be made through the relevant Committee: and particularly through the Liaison Committee or Graduate Liaison Committee.

The College anticipates that complaints will normally be dealt with informally in the first instance. You should seek to bring any complaint to the attention of the College as soon as possible following the occurrence of a problem and ideally within one calendar month. Many complaints can be dealt with quickly and effectively in this manner, without recourse to formal procedure. The College's procedures have been developed with this in mind.

Every attempt will be made to maintain the confidentiality of a complainant. However, where a complaint is of a personal nature against an individual, it is likely that your identity would have to be revealed at some stage in all but the most exceptional cases for there to be a fair investigation. The College will endeavour to inform you of the extent to which your identity is likely to be revealed at each stage of the procedure.

You may of course wish to complain about a matter that is not within the control of the College but within that of another institution, e.g. the University or another College. The University publishes various Policies and Procedures covering Faculties, Departments, and other University institutions, and Colleges each publish their own. In this case the first thing to do will be to identify the appropriate point of contact within the Faculty, Department or College. You may either contact that person directly or ask your Tutor, your Director of Studies, or the Senior Tutor of Murray Edwards College to take up the matter on your behalf. The College has a responsibility to help you identify mechanisms and to offer appropriate assistance in making a complaint within the University. If it is unclear to you where responsibility for the matter lies you may consult seek advice from any of the persons listed in Appendix 1.

Complaints relating to the behaviour of contractors and others working for the College should not be taken up directly with the individual concerned but should be made either directly or through a Tutor to the College Office responsible for the contract (generally the Bursar's Office).

Where a complaint includes an allegation that an offence has been committed of a **criminal nature** it may of course be reported by the complainant to the police. In so far as there is no conflict of interest the College will seek to offer advice and support in such cases, and you may wish to seek legal advice.

## **I. Informal Procedure**

Stage one: If you experience a problem with any aspect of College provision, you should where possible first raise the matter with the individual who has handled the matter or the person responsible for the area to which the complaint relates (see Appendix 2), either directly or, if preferred, through a College Tutor. A prompt response can be expected.

Where the complaint relates to general policy rather than any individual, it will need to be referred to the appropriate College Committee. You can ask your Tutor, Director of Studies or the Senior Tutor to do this, or you can raise the matter via the NHU or MCR Committee, as most College Committees have student representatives on them, and a Liaison Committee and Graduate Liaison Committee exist specifically for the purpose of determining policy on matters of mutual interest.

Stage two: Where you a student feels that the nature of the complaint is too serious to be dealt with informally by herself or through a Tutor, or where, after the relevant Head of Department/Service has been approached, a satisfactory conclusion has not been reached, a complaint should be made in writing to the Complaints Officer who shall normally be the Senior Tutor. You should give sufficient details to allow appropriate investigation, and should indicate the form of remedy you are seeking (without prejudice to the final remedy determined). Where a complaint is upheld, appropriate remedies may include a written and/or oral explanation or apology, a change in practice or policy, financial compensation, or disciplinary or other appropriate action against the person complained against.

The Complaints Officer will investigate the matter as soon as possible, including inviting a written statement from the person or persons complained against. You can expect an initial response to a complaint within 7 days of its receipt, and a considered response in writing, giving reasons for the decision, and setting out the details of any remedy, within three weeks. Any subsequent remedy will be implemented with the minimum of delay. The President should be asked to appoint an alternative Complaints Officer if needed in a case in which the Senior Tutor is the subject of the complaint.

## **II. Formal Complaints Procedure**

It is hoped that very few complaints would remain unresolved after this stage. However should this be the case, you can ask the College Council (through the President) to appoint a Student Complaints Committee to undertake an independent assessment of the case and come to a conclusion on the matter.

The Committee shall consist of the President (in the Chair) and either two Fellows, or one Fellow and one junior member of the College (who shall normally be the President of the JCR or the MCR), it being up to the complainant to decide whether or not she wishes there to be student representation on the Committee. No person who has had, or may have, any personal involvement in the matter to which the complaint relates shall be a member of the Student Complaints Committee. In the event that the President is thus debarred from acting, her place on the Committee shall be taken by the Vice-President, or by another Fellow chosen by the College Council; in the event that the President

of the JCR or the MCR is debarred from acting, her place shall be taken by another junior member chosen by College Council.

The Student Complaints Committee shall receive a copy of all documentation relating to the informal stages of the complaints procedure. The Chair shall write to the complainant informing her of the composition of the Committee and the time and place arranged for its meeting, and soliciting any further submissions in writing which the complainant may wish to make. The Chair shall at the same time write to any person or persons against whom the complaint is made, informing them of the complaint which has been made, of the composition of the Committee and the date on which it is to meet, and inviting them to make submissions in writing for the Committee to consider. The complainant and any person or persons against whom the complaint is made shall have the right to challenge the appointment of any person as a member of the Committee. The College Council shall consider any such challenge and may remove and replace the Committee member concerned if they think it appropriate to do so. Final copies of all paperwork relating to the complaint shall be sent both to the complainant and to any person complained against at least 7 days before the meeting of the Committee.

Both the complainant and any person against whom the complaint is made shall have the right to attend in person at the meeting of the Committee in order to make oral submissions, although the Committee's deliberations, following hearing of the submissions, shall be held in private. The complainant and any person against whom the complaint is made shall, if attending in person, be entitled to be accompanied by another person of her/his choosing (such as a Tutor or other senior member, a student including one of the officers of the JCR or MCR, an officer of CUSU or the Graduate Union). The Committee may require the attendance of, and hear evidence from, any other person or persons as it thinks fit.

The Committee shall come to a decision as soon as possible after the hearing of the case, and shall, within four weeks of Full Term of the date when the matter was first referred to the College Council under this procedure, give to the complainant and to any person or persons against whom the complaint is made a full written statement of its response to the complaint, giving reasons for its decision, and setting out the details of any remedy. Any such remedy shall be implemented with the minimum of delay.

### **Appeal beyond the College**

The formal process described above constitutes the last of the College's internal procedures for resolving a Complaint. If you remain unsatisfied at the end of it, you may apply to National Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education. An outline of this can be found at [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

## Appendix 1: Persons from Whom Help may be Sought

Help and advice may be sought from anyone; listed below are those contacts with a specific role to assist students.

For Undergraduates	Director of Studies (in matters relating to supervision or other academic provision) Tutor (for any matters) Senior Tutor MECU President, Academic Affairs Officer, Welfare Officer CUSU Academic Affairs Officer, Welfare Officer
For Graduates	Graduate Tutor Executive Graduate Tutor Senior Tutor MCR Officers Graduate Union

## Appendix 2: Persons responsible for certain areas of activity

Contact details for those responsible for different areas of College activity can mostly be found easily at [Murray Edwards Directory](#). The following list may help when it is less obvious who to approach.

Academic provision	Director of Studies Senior Tutor
Accommodation	Accommodation Manager Rooms Tutor
Student bills/accounts	Student Accountant Bursar
Alumnae/Development Office	Development Director President
Cleaning	Housekeeper Accommodation Office
Directors of Studies	Senior Tutor
Entertainments, parties	Conference Administrator Dean
Health Centre	College Nurse Senior Tutor
Maintenance	Maintenance Superintendent (contacted via Porters) Bursar
MCR	MCR President MCR Senior Treasurer

Murray Edwards College Union (JCR)	JCR President, or JCR Senior Treasurer
Supervisions	Director of Studies Senior Tutor
Conduct of Examinations	Tutors
Tutorial Office	Tutorial Administrator Senior Tutor
Other students	Tutors
Conference guests	Conference Office
Tutors	Senior Tutor