

Faculty of Education Practitioner Professional Development Policy

PPDP003 **Student Complaints Policy**

Last Reviewed: July 2012

Introduction:

The Faculty of Education is committed to the highest standards of educational and other provision for students, and encourages students to provide members of the Faculty with constructive feedback. Formal evaluations as part of course Quality Assurance arrangements, together with other feedback comments and consultations, are used to make further improvements to provision.

Our key commitments are to provide:

- **clear, accurate and up-to-date information about our provision**
- **efficient response to enquiries and comments**
- **a safe, professional and friendly learning environment**
- **high quality teaching, assessment and management of learning**
- **regular feedback on progress and achievements**
- **reliable and impartial advice, and guidance about progression**

The Faculty, together with its partnership organisations and staff, will gather student feedback on a systematic basis during each course. These systematic arrangements will be used to evaluate the perceptions of students and to make improvements, where necessary. Feedback given to partner organisations will be checked by members of the Faculty during quality assurance visits. Improvement actions to be taken on the basis of student feedback will be publicised to relevant individuals, groups and the Faculty as a whole, as appropriate and will be included in improvement plans and Annual reports for each course within this provision.

Procedures relating to Student Complaints

Formal complaints from individual students (in the form of e-mails, letters and outline details of interviews with complainants) will be logged by members of the Faculty, but all original correspondence and details of actions to be taken are held by the Secretary of the Faculty, as part of the collation, analysis and coordinated action on complaints.

Analyses of complaints and responses made will be presented by the Secretary of the Faculty on a termly basis to **the PPD Management Group and the Higher Degrees & PPD Standing Committee (SCHD&PPD)** and on an annual basis to **the Faculty Board** as part of reporting on quality, equality and diversity.

Our Complaints procedure will be publicised to staff and students, and, as with this policy, will be reviewed on an annual basis, taking note of comments from staff and students.

It is important that students say where there is cause for concern in individual or general matters. The Faculty staff want to learn and so further improve provision.

The Faculty undertakes to take such representation seriously. In raising possible issues of complaint students will themselves be aware of and have observed their obligations as students of the Faculty.

The Faculty aims to handle complaints in a way which is sympathetic, fair, and efficient, which encourages informal conciliation, facilitates early resolution, maintains individual privacy and confidentiality, and permits useful feedback.

A complaint will normally be about a problem encountered by a student in connection with educational or other activities or services provided by the Faculty. It will not necessarily be against anybody, whether a person or service, although some complaints may be against individuals or Faculty services. Complaints principally arising about matters covered by other specific procedures (such as those for the review of course results) should be raised under those procedures. Advice about these procedures will be provided by the Course Team.

Because the purpose of the complaints procedure is, if possible, to resolve problems, a complaint should be made promptly, in an attempt to resolve them quickly and informally. Usually the problem can be solved there and then. Help with making a complaint will be provided, if needed.

Student Complaints Procedure

There are three stages to the complaints procedure:

- i. Discussion and Advice
- ii. Informal Process
- iii. Formal Process at the Faculty of Education

Some general points about the procedure

The student is entitled to fair and independent consideration of a complaint. The rights of the student and the rights of any person complained against are both important and must be kept in balance. Every effort will be made to ensure that both are treated with fairness and dignity.

Complaints will not be treated as though lodged against the Faculty unless that is stated to be the case. There will be separation between the provision for advice and provision for dealing with or adjudicating on a complaint. The student should not suffer retaliation for making a complaint in good faith and a student who believes that he or she has suffered a reprisal should raise the matter. If a complaint which is not upheld is found to have been made maliciously, the student may be subject to disciplinary procedure.

The student may withdraw a complaint or stop the process at any time in Stage 1 or 2 and, in Stage 3, with the consent of the Chairman of the panel. Personal privacy will be respected. Confidential information will not be communicated without the consent of the student, other than in exceptional circumstances (for example in reporting an alleged criminal offence to the Police). The student has a free choice of adviser and of representative, who need not be the same person.

Complaints will be dealt with promptly to ensure that delay does not hinder fair resolution. Minor complaints will normally be resolved at an early stage.

A complaint can only be brought by a student affected, although several affected students may act together.

If a complaint is upheld there should be a satisfactory remedy or outcome, which may include:

- a full explanation;
- an apology (which is not an admission of liability);
- the matter put right if possible;
- if appropriate, some kind of financial recompense (for example if the student had paid for something which he or she did not receive);
- if appropriate, disciplinary action may be taken.

Written records will be kept of complaints. The student will have access to the documents submitted about his or her case, and those taking part in the complaint will be informed that this is so. Otherwise the records will be confidential. An annual report will be made to the Faculty Board, in which references to individual cases will be made anonymously.

Stage 1: Discussion and Advice

- 1.1** It is very important to get early advice about problems. Often, this can resolve the matter quickly and informally.
- 1.2** Normally, a student would seek the advice of a Supervisor, Course Tutor or the PPD Programme Manager.
- 1.3** The student can expect normally to be given advice within 2 working days of making contact with the Faculty, or its partner organisations, about the issue on how to proceed and on an appropriate course of action, advice about what would constitute an appropriate remedy, and an opportunity to consider whether there is indeed a complaint to be addressed. The student will then be in a position to decide whether to proceed further, and how.

Stage 2: Informal Process

- 2.1** It is in the interest of the students that a complaint to be dealt with informally should be raised at the 'local' level as soon as possible. If there has been a delay the student should explain the reason. The student should if possible record the complaint in writing (the advice about a written statement in Stage 3 may be helpful).
- 2.2** The student should if possible raise the complaint directly with the person responsible for the matter. It may not always be easy to do this if the complaint is about the conduct of this person: if for some reason the student cannot go direct to the person alone he or she should ask for someone else to be present, or should raise the matter with another person in the organisation concerned (the Head, Deputy Head, or Secretary of the Faculty, or a person or persons nominated for the purpose).
- 2.3** If possible a suitable solution will be agreed and implemented, to solve the problem.
- 2.4** If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of such an informal process, he or she may consider whether to raise the matter formally through Stage 3.

Stage 3: Formal Process

- 3.1** Students must exhaust informal routes before making a formal complaint, or give a good reason for not doing so. A good reason might be that the problem is particularly serious, or that when it was raised informally there was refusal to deal with it. Informal processes are suitable for dealing with many problems, but if a complaint includes very serious allegations, and especially where a person complained against must have an opportunity to give his or her side of the matter, it may be necessary to refer straight to Stage 3. If

informal routes seem not to have been exhausted a formal complaint may be referred to informal resolution.

3.2 A student wishing to make a formal complaint must do so in writing. The written statement initiates the formal process and must include a description of what has happened to give rise to the complaint including dates, times, and other details. It is necessary to show that something has gone wrong in the discharge of a duty towards the student, and that the student has suffered as a result. The statement should include:

- the name of the person against whom the complaint is made (but a complaint need not necessarily be against a person);
- the name of any witnesses who will corroborate the complaint, including a written statement from each to say that they have given their consent;
- documentary evidence, together with a list of contents and numbered pages;
- an outline of what action a student would like to be taken or what remedy he or she is seeking;
- if desired, the name of the person who has agreed to accompany, support, or represent the student at any meeting or hearing.

It would almost always be sensible for the student to discuss the written statement of the complaint with an appropriate adviser (for example those named in paragraph 1.2). The complaint should be addressed to the Secretary of the Faculty, 184 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8PQ.

3.3. The complaint will be referred within 5 working days to a Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three members:

- a Chair, the Head of Faculty (or a deputy);
- at least one senior member of the Faculty Board, not connected with the course/programme of the student;
- one student member not connected with the course/programme of the student (unless the student requests that there should not be a student on the Panel, in which case a second senior member will be identified).

3.4. The Faculty Board will approve lists of persons in each of the above categories.

3.5. The written statement of complaint will also be referred by the Secretary of the Faculty to the person concerned. They will be asked to make a written response within 5 working days, which will be referred to the Panel.

3.6. Normally, the Chair of the Panel will arrange for the Panel to hear representations within 20 working days about the complaint. At such a hearing the student will present his or her case, and any person or institution complained against will reply. Witnesses or others making statements will be heard at the discretion of the Panel. The student (and any person concerned) may speak in person or be represented. Notice of the hearing shall be given to the student, and any person to whom notice of a complaint has been given. At the end of the hearing the Panel shall consider their decision in private, and shall notify it in writing as soon as possible, with reasons.

3.7. The Panel may make recommendations as to the remedies, if any, to be adopted.

3.8. The Chair of the Panel shall have power to terminate the proceedings, to determine that a complaint is to be rejected as vexatious or frivolous, or to refer the complaint for informal resolution as in Stage 2.

3.9. Legal representation and legal advice would not normally be necessary. Exceptionally, the Faculty Board will consider on its merits any request for financial assistance towards legal advice or legal representation for the student or a person complained against.

3.10. No documents should be taken into consideration which are not available to the student, the Panel and any person concerned. The Chair of the Panel may request the disclosure of documents requested by the student or any person or institution concerned. The

Chair should seek to ensure that appropriate safeguards are made for confidentiality of disclosed documents.

Timing

A complaint shall be made under Stage 2 or Stage 3 within three months of the occurrence of the matter complained about, unless the Chair of the Panel at his or her discretion rules otherwise, for good cause.