

Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Royal Veterinary College is concerned to ensure that any student or applicant who considers that they have received poor service or has been unreasonably treated by the College has scope to raise a complaint.
- 1.2 Students and applicants should feel confident in making a complaint; they will not experience any detriment or disadvantage in further dealings with the College by reason of making a complaint in good faith.
- 1.3 This procedure provides for initial informal resolution and then two further stages of formal proceedings. It is intended that most issues will be dealt with at an informal level.
- 1.4 The College will evaluate its complaints, along with other forms of feedback, in order to improve its dealings with applicants and students.

2 Scope and relation to other procedures

- 2.1 **Applicants:** All complaints from applicants will be managed under the appropriate [admissions procedure](#).
- 2.2 **Academic Appeals:** Students who seek an academic resolution (for example, they have failed an assessment or appraisal and cannot continue to study for their chosen award) should refer to the College's Appeals Procedure.
- 2.3 **Appeals, Misconduct, Failure to meet Professional or Study Requirements:** A student cannot use this procedure to complain about the conduct or outcome of another formal process. The related procedure for that process is [Final Formal Review](#).
- 2.4 **Misconduct:** Students who are subject to warning or penalty as a result of a meeting with the Senior Tutor may complain using this procedure if they feel they have been dealt with unfairly or unreasonably.
- 2.5 **Dignity at Work (bullying and harassment):** The College's stance on this matter is described more fully in sections 1 and 2 of the Dignity at Work document which can be found [here](#). Students who feel they have been the subject of such behaviour should use this Complaints procedure.
- 2.6 **College committees and Quality Assurance (QA) Procedures:** Many College committees and QA Procedures provide opportunities for student feedback. e.g. Course Management Committees, Student Surveys, Student Representatives. More details can be found [here](#). Where students have particular suggestions for improvement to make or wish to make general comment then they should use those procedures. Where a student feels that there has been particular disadvantage or that the situation is more urgent, then they should use this procedure.

3 Timings and Outcomes

- 3.1 Students should submit their complaint as soon as possible and certainly within three months of the event which has prompted the complaint.
- 3.2 The College will endeavour to complete each stage of the process in reasonable time. We would not normally expect any Stage to take more than 30 calendar days, or 90 calendar days for all three stages, without adequate explanation.
- 3.3 This procedure allows all forms of reasonable redress and apology where a complaint is upheld.
- 3.4 At all stages of this procedure, due regard will be taken of the [RVC Charter](#) for students and the balance of responsible behaviour expected by both the College and the students.

4 Complaints which are anonymous, unfounded, primarily intended to cause annoyance or hurt (vexatious)

- 4.1 Anonymous complaints will not be considered.
- 4.2 Students who make complaints that are subsequently found to be vexatious or completely unfounded may themselves be subject of misconduct proceedings.
- 4.3 This procedure may be halted at any stage if the investigator judges the complainant to be vexatious.

5 Initial Advice

- 5.1 Students unsure about making a complaint may approach any of the following for initial advice:
 - Tutor
 - Supervisor
 - Student union representative
 - Course Leader
 - Year Leader
 - Postgraduate Adviser
 - Research Degrees Officer
 - Advice Centre staff
 - Admissions Officers

6 Means of Communication and Receipt of Complaints

- 6.1 All Stage 1 complaints should be made in person or in writing via email or letter. All Stage 2 or 3 complaints must be made in writing via a formal letter attached to an email. Social media should not be used as the means of making complaints.

6.2 In any communication, the student should state:

- the circumstances of their complaint
- the remedy they seek (what they hope to achieve)

6.3 All complaints received will be acknowledged by the member of the College receiving the complaint. If the complaint has not previously been considered at Stage 1 or 2 of this procedure, it will be redirected to the appropriate stage by the person acknowledging the complaint.

7 Record Keeping and Improvements

7.1 Records of complaints will be retained for 7 years. Details will remain separate from the student's record unless the complaint was considered to be vexatious.

7.2 Each year a report will be presented to the Council by the Vice Principal (Learning and the Student Experience) which details the types of complaints received and the recommendations for improvement that were made as a result. This report will not refer to named individuals.

8 Stage 1: Informal

8.1 Process: Students should raise their concerns in person or in writing via email or letter (not social media) directly with the member of staff most related to the concern. If the student feels uncomfortable about this they may raise it through a third party, such as (but not exclusively) their tutor or supervisor, postgraduate adviser, member of the Advice Centre or Student Union representative.

8.2 Redirection: If the complaint concerns the conduct of assessment the student should be asked to refer directly to Stage 2. If the complaint is more appropriately raised through a student representative on a committee then the student should be asked to seek out their representative.

8.3 The person(s) involved will consider the issues presented and may determine, implement or recommend to the College as necessary, an appropriate remedy at this Stage if they consider the complaint is justified in whole or part. The person can ask for the student to provide supporting or independent evidence. The person undertaking the Stage One investigation will not undertake a formal investigation. If an immediate resolution cannot be implemented ("problem fixed") then the person investigating should write to the student to explain what has happened.

8.4 Records and Improvement: No formal record of the handling of the informal complaint will be kept for the College's complaints logging purposes, although records may be created and retained for other purposes. Any possible incremental improvement that could be made by either the College or the complainant as a result of the informal discussions should be made.

9 Stage 2: Formal Complaint

- 9.1 Process: If a complaint has not been resolved at Stage 1, the student should write to the College's Complaints Officer. See section 6 above.
- 9.2 Redirection: Where the College's Complaints Officer receives a complaint unrelated to assessment or academic progress that has not been to Stage 1, s/he will advise that the student should raise the matter with the person concerned in the first instance, if appropriate. Where the complaint concerns the relevant College's Complaints Officer, the Chief Operating Officer (COO) will appoint another member of staff to take their role.
- 9.3 The College's Complaints Officer or COO will appoint an independent and appropriately experienced person to undertake an investigation. ('Investigator').
- 9.4 Where the complaint relates to current supervision or other difficulties with a member of staff the Investigator appointed should be independent of both parties and have been accepted by both parties.
- 9.5 The Investigator shall ensure the student is informed about the power and scope of his/her investigation.
- 9.6 The Investigator shall ensure that the student is informed about a reasonable range of possible remedies for the complaint should the complaint be upheld.
- 9.7 The Investigator shall ensure that the student is informed that at any meeting s/he can be accompanied by a friend.
- 9.8 The Investigator should ensure that they have received information from all key people involved in the matter.
- 9.9 Where the complaint concerns interaction with other students or staff the Investigator may recommend referral to a mediator at any stage of the investigation. If all parties accept mediation then this investigation will be at an end. Once any mediation is concluded the mediator will report back to the Complaints Officer to confirm either the situation is concluded or the complaint needs to be reinstated.
- 9.10 Where the complaint has not been redirected to mediation, the Investigator will reach an informed view on the merits of the complaint by considering the balance of probabilities and shall write a draft report confirming either:
- (i) the complaint is clearly upheld and if so, the remedy proposed for resolution of the complaint.
 - (ii) the complaint is clearly not to be upheld
 - (iii) the case is complex and the findings would benefit from discussion with a panel.
- 9.11 The College's Complaints Officer or COO will consider the report and determine whether or not to convene a panel.

- 9.12 If a panel is to be convened it will be formed of 2 members of a standing [panel](#) of 6 members approved by the Principal. The third member will be a nominee of the President of the Union selected for (i) their independence from the student whose case is being considered (ii) their understanding of the principles at stake and (iii) the broad context of the study of the student whose case is being considered. The College's Complaints Officer or COO will appoint one of the members to act as Chair.
- 9.13 The Student Union member of the panel can be omitted from the panel membership at the request of the student whose case is being considered. Where this occurs the quorum will be reduced by one member.
- 9.14 The panel will receive the report of the investigation and the student's original written complaint. The panel will determine on the balance of probabilities whether to uphold the complaint or not. If the complaint is upheld they will also determine a remedy. The Chair of the panel shall write a short report outlining the key points of the discussion and conclusions.
- 9.15 The College's Complaints Officer or COO will write to the student with the outcome of the complaint.
- 9.16 Records and Improvement: The person undertaking the Stage 2 process shall keep a simple record of the complaint, its outcome and associated recommendations for improvement.

10 Stage 3: Opportunity for Final Formal Review

- 10.1 A student who has grounds to believe (i) the decision of the Investigator is unreasonable, or (ii) the investigation was not conducted properly or (ii) if the student has new evidence they could not have shown to the investigator at the proper time then they can apply for [Final Formal Review](#) within 28 calendar days.
- 10.2 The possible outcomes of this stage: a) that the request for review will be rejected and a Completion of Procedures Letter issued or, b) that the Chief Operating Officer (COO) will convene a review panel to conduct the [Final Formal Review](#).

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