



Student Complaints Procedure

Guidance Notes for Students

1. These notes are intended to provide you with a user-friendly guide to how you can raise a complaint about any aspect of Apex College's educational provision, facilities or services. Apex College has many ways in which you can raise a concern and should not result in you using the formal Complaints Procedure. For example, you can raise concerns with your lecturers, through your Student Representatives, through the HND Academic Programme Director or the Vice-Principal. You should try your best to resolve any concern you have at an informal level first. Only when you feel that this has not worked or that the matter is very serious should you use the formal Complaints Procedure.
2. These notes give you some guidance about how to raise a complaint, however, you must carefully read Apex College's Complaints Procedure which can be found on the website (www.apexcollege.co.uk) and in your student handbook.
3. There are a number of circumstances under which you cannot use the Complaints Procedure. If your dissatisfaction is something to do with marks/grades you have been awarded for coursework, dissertation or an examination, or to do with an academic award you have been made, then you will need to use academic Appeals Procedure. This can be found on Apex College's website (www.apexcollege.co.uk), your student handbook or the College virtual learning environment (VLE).
4. If you are dissatisfied with services or facilities that are outside of Apex College's control you cannot use this Complaints Procedure. However, staff at Apex College might be able to help you with identifying how to make a complaint and to whom in such circumstances.
5. It is not possible for someone else to raise a concern or complaint on your behalf, even if they are your parent, spouse, brother or sister. Apex College has a clear formal relationship with you, it does not have any formal relationship with anyone else on your behalf, even if, for example, your parent or spouse is paying your fees for the programme you are studying at Apex College. Consequently, while you can obtain whatever advice and support you wish in formulating your complaint it must be you who personally who raises the complaint.
6. The Complaints Procedure encourages you to try to resolve your complaint at an informal level (Stage 1) first. If you do wish to make a formal complaint this must be done in accordance with the Complaints Procedure and you are required to complete the Complaints Form for any Stage 2 complaint. If you write to or e-mail any member of staff without completing the Complaint Form this will not be regarded as a formal, Stage 2 complaint. Where the issue you raise is potentially serious staff at Apex College will be advised not to respond to your written communications until you have completed and submitted the Complaint Form. Similarly, if a member of staff has tried to resolve a complaint at Stage 1 or informally with you, but after an exchange of correspondence, has not managed to achieve resolution with you, Apex College's staff



have been advised not to respond further unless you raise the complaint at Stage 2. In both cases, the member of staff will say to you what they are doing and refer you to the formal Stage 2 Complaints Procedure and the need to fill in the Complaints Form.

7. If you wish to raise an issue in confidence you are able to do so. In fact, if you raise an issue with a member of staff, they need your permission before they can discuss it with anyone else. However, you should be aware that there is often little that can be done if you do not give this permission. In any event, all concerns and complaints will remain confidential to those people who are directly involved in any investigation into a complaint that you make.

8. It is a breach of both the staff and student disciplinary procedures for anyone to victimise you for raising and/or submitting a complaint. Your complaint does not have need to be found to be justified; you simply have to be raising it in good faith, that is, believing it is a valid complaint. On the other hand, if you make or support a complaint that you know is untrue or unfounded, you are liable to be disciplined.

9. While, in general, making a complaint will not and should not have any noticeable impact on the day-to-day working relationship between you and any members of staff. However, there are circumstances and types of complaint that could adversely affect your relationship with one or more members of staff, for example, if you have specifically complained about them. While Apex College is confident that no member of staff would victimise, in any way, any student who has raised a complaint, whatever the circumstances, we understand that you may not be confident that this is the case. Apex College, therefore, has to balance the need to avoid unnecessary disturbance to you of your existing teaching, supervision and assessment arrangements with the need to demonstrate beyond doubt that you have not been victimised as a consequence of raising your complaint.

10. If you only have a general working relationship with the relevant member of staff (for example, the member of staff teaches on a module you are studying), it is expected that both you and the member of staff will continue the relationship in a professional manner and allow matters that you are complaining about to be progressed through the Complaints Procedure. Only in exceptional circumstances will the HND Programme Director or Vice-Principal consider agreeing to alternative working arrangements while your complaint is being investigated. On the other hand, if you have to work more directly with the relevant member of staff (for example, he or she supervises your dissertation, or would normally assess and mark your work before the investigation into the complaint is likely to be completed) the HND Academic Programme Director or Vice-Principal will endeavour to make alternative arrangements if you make such a request or it is deemed appropriate given the circumstances.

11. To make a formal Stage 2 complaint in line with the Complaints Procedure you must fill in each section of the Complaints Form and submit it to the Head of Administration. The Head of Administration will first ensure that the complaint you are making is most appropriately dealt with through the Complaints Procedure or is more appropriately dealt with through the Academic Appeals procedure. If the latter your complaint will be dealt with through this procedure and you will be informed of this in writing. If you



complaint is appropriate to the Complaints procedure you will receive an acknowledgement letter within five working days of your submission of the Complaints Form.

12. The Head of Administration will appoint an appropriate member of staff to investigate your complaint. The appointed person will, in most circumstances, want to speak to you about your complaint to clarify matters to do with the issues that you have raised. The investigating manager will submit a report to the Head of Administration. The report will provide a summary of the evidence gathered about the complaint and make one of three general recommendations:

- (a) to dismiss the complaint
- (b) to suggest an amicable settlement to you, as the complainant
- (c) to find the complaint justified and make suggest an offer of redress.

You will receive a letter from the Head of Administration within 15 working days of the Complaint Form being received. The letter will address each complaint made and justify the grounds upon which decisions have been made. A copy of this letter will also be given to the Principal.

13. If you are not satisfied with the response you may move to Stage 3 and lodge an appeal to the Head of Administration. This must be done using the Appeal Against the Outcome of a Complaint Form. Within 10 working days the Head of Administration will decide if there is a prima facie case to refer to matter to the Complaints Review Panel. You can expect to receive a letter within 10 working days of submitting the Appeal Against the Outcome of a Complaint Form informing you of whether or not a Complaints Review Panel will be convened to look into your appeal. A Complaints Review Panel will be convened within 15 working days of submission of your appeal and you should expect to receive a letter detailing the outcome within 5 working days of the Complaints Review Panel having met. If your appeal is upheld the letter will inform you of what action has been taken or is proposed in the light of the Panel's recommendations.

14. If you are not satisfied with the response to your appeal (as a result of submitting the Appeal against the Outcome of a Complaint Form) you may go externally to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (www.oiahe.org.uk). The Office of the Independent adjudicator will only look at you case only if you have exhausted the internal procedures of Apex College. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator is a body set up by the Government and which is independent of Apex College, Universities and other institutions of higher education.

16. The flow chart summarises the various stages and timescales of Apex College's Student Complaints procedure.

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