

Complaints Procedure

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Introduction

We aim to ensure your experience of the Isle of Wight College is positive. However, we know that occasionally people may have concerns about some areas of our work, or the conduct of our staff or students.

We take complaints seriously. We view them as an important way of improving what we do. Complaints can let us know about difficulties or problems in our systems and may lead us to change and improve processes and procedures.

This procedure explains how students, former students, users of the college's services and stakeholders can make complaints about the services offered by the college.

Our complaints procedure covers concerns and formal complaints. For the purpose of this policy a complaint is defined as: *"An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more people about the college's action, or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by, or on behalf of, the college"* (OIA, 2016).

Examples of complaints can include:

- Teaching and learning, including on higher education programmes
- Equality and diversity issues
- The college environment, such as facilities and resources
- The distribution and administration of student support funds
- The services we provide – the college restaurant, the hair and beauty salons, gym
- Franchised provision
- Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses, promotional material or other information provided by the college
- Failure by the college to meet obligations including those outlined in the course/student handbooks and student charter

Principles of the complaints procedure

We want our complaints procedure to be easily accessible, well publicised and easy to use.

We will handle complaints in line with the principles below:

- We will handle complaints speedily and with rigorous standards for action and keeping people informed
- The process will be consistent, treating people in similar circumstances in similar ways
- We will investigate complaints thoroughly
- We will consider and respond to complaints in a fair and even-handed way

- Anyone submitting a complaint will not be disadvantaged in their dealings with the college as a consequence of their complaint.
- We will provide a full response which tackles all the issues raised
- We will provide clear information on what to do if people are unhappy with the response, including eventual recourse to an external agency
- We will prioritise complaints that we consider to be high risk, for example, those relating to safeguarding or disability support, or where the impact of the issues raised has detrimental consequences for the student's mental health or where the student displays distress.
- We will regularly monitor complaints
- We will report annually on the level and nature of complaints to the college governors.

We will investigate every complaint thoroughly and deal with the issues as quickly as possible. We will admit our failings if the facts clearly prove that we have not delivered an acceptable standard of service.

We initially aim to resolve concerns informally, as described below. If you feel your concern should be treated as a formal complaint as set out in stage 3 of the below procedure, we encourage you to put it in writing, or make it clear to the person receiving your complaint that you wish your concern to be treated as a formal complaint.

You may nominate someone else to act on your behalf when submitting your complaint and subsequently liaising with the college. If you wish to do this, we will require from you a signed, written statement, confirming the name and contact details of the person you wish to appoint and the scope and capacity in which they will represent you. In handling the complaint, we will liaise directly with your representative, in accordance with your instructions, but will always send the final outcome letter to both you and your representative.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding young people and adults with care and support needs is a central part of our business. Our definition of safeguarding can be summarised as:

- Protecting young people and adults with care and support needs from maltreatment, harm, risk, attempted harm and abuse – whether this be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological abuse or neglect – with the addition of financial abuse for adults with care and support needs
- Undertaking that role so as to enable those young people and adults with care and support needs to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.

If you have a concern about the safety of a young person or adult with care and support needs at the college you should contact the college switchboard (01983 526631), where you will be referred to one of the college staff with responsibility for dealing with safeguarding matters.

You can read more about our commitment to protecting learners in our Safeguarding Policy, which is available on the college website.

Special educational needs and disability (SEND)

The college always strives to meet the needs of all users of its services, including those with a special educational need and those with a disability. The college's equality, diversity and inclusion policy, which is available on the college website, sets out the college's approach to achieve this.

If a user of the college's services with a special educational need or a disability is unhappy with the support they are receiving, they should follow the steps set out in this procedure. The college recognises that they may need additional support in doing this and will ensure that this is available. Young people aged 16-25, may find it helpful to refer to the Department for Education guide, 'Special educational needs and disability (SEND) complaints: A guide for Young People in education', a copy of which is available on the college website.

Stage 1: Resolving concerns informally

We encourage anyone with a concern or a complaint to raise these as soon as possible so that we can deal with them quickly.

If you are already a student at the college you should, in the first instance, speak to your tutor, course co-ordinator, head of department, curriculum manager or student progress advisor (SPA). These people will do all they can to sort out the matters raised, through discussions and asking for advice where necessary.

If you are not a student at the college, please talk to our staff at reception or in our student services area, who will be happy to help resolve the matter.

To help develop and improve the service we offer, we keep records of matters raised and how they were resolved.

If we cannot resolve your concerns informally, or if you do not feel that we have dealt with your concern adequately, you may wish to move to stage 2 of our complaints procedure.

Please note:

1. Where appropriate, reference will be made to other college policies or procedures such as: Grievance Procedure, Student Disciplinary Procedure, Harassment Policy
2. The college will not investigate anonymous complaints or those considered to be malicious.

Stage 2: Contacting student services

If you are unhappy with the response you receive to an initial complaint, you can talk to one of our student progress advisors.

The student progress advisor will listen to your concerns, check what action has already been taken and, where necessary, ask questions to make sure they clearly understand your issues. If necessary, the student progress advisor will then contact those best placed to help.

The student progress advisor will, if appropriate, advise and support you with the aim of brokering a resolution. Although the college is unable to provide advocacy services these are available from Southern Advocacy Services should you feel that you require additional support. Further information and their contact details are available on the following link: www.southernadvocacyservices.co.uk

The staff will keep a written record of each case so that it can be used if any further investigation is needed. We will try to make sure that you are satisfied that we have done everything possible to resolve your concern.

If you feel that the matter has not been resolved, we will tell you how to make a formal complaint.

Stage 3: Initiating a formal complaint

If it has not been possible to resolve your concerns informally, you may decide to make a formal complaint. Complaints could be about the conduct of our staff; our teaching and learning; our administrative processes; the college environment; or a combination of these. If you wish to make a formal complaint, we encourage you to lodge it within 30 days of the incident to ensure that the issue can be investigated fully and acted upon promptly, and no more than 90 days after the incident has occurred.

It is helpful if you can make formal complaints in writing, either in a letter or an email or by using the complaint form available at the college reception or on the college website. Putting the complaint in writing can help you be clear on your concerns and ensure that we have responded to each of your points. If, however, you do not wish to put the complaint in writing, but still wish it to be treated as a formal complaint please make this clear to the person who is helping you.

If you have special circumstances which mean that you cannot send us a complaint in writing, or would like some assistance in submitting a complaint, then please contact a student progress advisor, who will be happy to assist you.

It is important that we have all the information, with all the points you want us to consider, from the start of the process. This will allow us to deal with your complaint more quickly and will reduce the need for us to ask for more information. Please give the reasons for your complaint as clearly as you can, with the main areas of concern set out and supported by examples. If you are unsure, the online complaints form may help you to structure your complaint. The Assistant Principal (Teaching, Learning, Students & HR) will initially assess your complaint and decide who will carry out the investigation. The Principal will be aware of your complaint and will oversee the investigation.

To submit your complaint, please either:

- a) Write to the Principal at the Isle of Wight College, Medina Way, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 5TA
- b) Send an e-mail to complaints@iwcollege.ac.uk, marked for the attention of the Principal
- c) Download the online complaints form, which can be found on the college website at www.iwcollege.ac.uk or collect a form from the main college reception, complete and submit to the Isle of Wight College, Medina Way, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 5TA

You will be sent an acknowledgement of your complaint within two working days of its receipt.

We will reply in writing and ensure that the outcome letter is sufficiently detailed to provide a full response to all aspects raised in your complaint. We will try to answer all of your concerns within 10 working days (during term time) from the date of receipt. Our reply will include details of how to proceed should you remain unhappy with the response. When we cannot answer concerns within 10 working days (term time), we will keep you informed about when you will receive a response.

We will ensure that the response provides a clear conclusion in terms of whether an aspect of a complaint has been upheld or not upheld. However, where the evidence is inconclusive, (for example, if there is a difference of opinion which cannot reasonably be resolved through independent confirmation) then no conclusion will be drawn and the outcome will be recorded as 'no decision could be reached'. Where this occurs, we will give a full explanation of why a conclusion cannot be reached.

Stage 4: Involving the Chair of Corporation

If you remain dissatisfied, you should contact the Chair of Governors of the Isle of Wight College at the address below and request a review of how the complaint was handled and the resolution offered:

Chair of Governors
Isle of Wight College
Medina Way
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 5TA

The request needs to be made within ten working days of the date of the reply to your complaint. You will receive an acknowledgement within two working days.

The Chair of Governors will consider your request and will carry out a review of the investigation and the outcome, taking account of your concerns. This review will also consider:

- Adherence to procedure
- Alleged discrimination or discourtesy
- Failure to apologise or accept mistakes
- The appropriateness of the remedies offered

Stage 5: Appeal to external agency

If, after having had your complaint reviewed by the Chair of Governors you do not believe the correct procedure has been followed, you should contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency at the address below. More information can be found on the Gov.uk website, which will guide you through the process and clearly sets out the parameters under which they operate

Complaints Team
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry, CV1 2WT

or by email to complaints.esfa@education.gov.uk

Full details of the process the Education and Skills Funding Agency will follow are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure>

For Higher Education courses:

Students studying on a higher education course should initially follow the college complaints procedure. If, once your complaint has been reviewed, you remain dissatisfied, then complaints should be directed to the respective university, as follows:

University of Portsmouth

Information Disclosure and Complaints Manager, Samantha Hill
Email: samantha.hill@port.ac.uk

University of Chichester

Director of Student & Academic Services, Sue Longden
Email: s.longden@chi.ac.uk