

St George's, University of London (SGUL)

**Student Concerns and Complaints Procedure 2021-22**

*Approved by Senate 1 September 2021*

**1. Introduction and Definitions**

- 1.1 This procedure is prescribed by Council in accordance with paragraph 21.2 of the General Regulations for Students and Programmes of Study.
- 1.2 This procedure applies to students and recent students of St George's, University of London. The term 'student' includes those registered or enrolled on a programme. It includes those on an interruption of study or suspension and those who left the University within a period of three calendar months.
- 1.3 In this procedure, a complaint is defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about the University's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of St George's, University of London*'. Examples of complaints may include:
- failure by the university to meet obligations including those outlined in course/student handbooks or a student charter
  - misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the university
  - concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching or administration
  - poor quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided directly by the university
  - complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing a service on behalf of the university
  - the actions of a member of staff or other student of St George's, except for those matters more specifically covered by other procedures and/or as detailed in paragraph 3 below.
- 1.4 This procedure may also be appropriate if a student feels that action taken by individuals under *initial* (informal or semi-formal) stages of any other approved procedure is inappropriate or inadequate, unless that other procedure is at the secondary (formal) stage, when such concerns shall be dealt with at that stage under those procedures.
- 1.5 A student may raise issues which do not fall neatly under one procedure. In this circumstance, the student will be informed whether the matters will be considered together or under two separate procedures, and whether one procedure may be put on hold pending completion of the other procedure.
- 1.6 In this procedure any named officer may delegate her or his responsibilities to another member of St George's; similarly, the procedure will not be invalidated if the role title named in the procedure has changed or a nominee acts in the place of another named in the procedure.

- 1.7 The Academic Registrar or his/her nominee may reject any complaint which is frivolous (i.e. repetitive and burdensome), vexatious (i.e. brought with malicious intent), or lacking substance (i.e. unsupported by evidence).
- 1.8 Any doubt over the interpretation of these procedures or any matter on which these procedures are silent shall be determined by the Chair of Council.

## **2. Complaints about other St George's Students**

- 2.1 In the spirit of collegiality, students who wish to complain about the actions of another student are expected to make reasonable attempts to resolve personal disagreements and be able to demonstrate that they have done so in the first instance before bringing the matter as a complaint to the University (see paragraphs 3.4 and 5.4).
- 2.2 Where there are circumstances that make it difficult or inappropriate for student(s) to resolve complaints about another student, advice should be sought from a Personal Tutor, Students' Union Vice-President (Education and Welfare) or Students' Union Education & Welfare Support Officer in the first instance. The Student Life Centre maintain a list of contact details.
- 2.3 St George's reserve the right to refer a complaint back to students if such informal attempts have not been made and/or if advice regarding available sources of support has not been taken.
- 2.4 The Academic Registrar or his/her nominee shall, if he or she considers it appropriate, investigate the matter and take appropriate action, which may include dealing with the student complained about under another appropriate procedure.

## **3. Matters Not Covered under the Student Complaints Procedure**

- 3.1 This procedure is not appropriate for dealing with 'appeals' against the decision of a committee of St George's taken under the formal stage of another procedure – this is provided for under the provisions of the appropriate procedure, and by the separate Student Appeals Procedure.
- 3.2 ***Complaints from applicants for programmes of study***  
This procedure does not apply to applicants to St George's. Applicants to St George's programmes who are dissatisfied with admission decisions may where circumstances allow, lodge a complaint under the Admissions Complaints Procedure. Complaints about admissions decisions should be addressed to the Senior Admissions Officer in the first instance at [admissionscomplaints@sgul.ac.uk](mailto:admissionscomplaints@sgul.ac.uk).
- 3.3 ***Complaints about decisions of Boards of Examiners (Academic Appeals)***  
Complaints about, and requests for review of Board of Examiners decisions are considered only on strictly limited grounds set out in paragraph 14 of the General Regulations for Students and Programmes of Study, and in accordance with the separate prescribed '*Academic Appeals Procedure*'.
- 3.4 ***Complaints about Student Union Societies and Events***  
St George's Students' Union operate separate policies for the regulation of student activities which fall under their jurisdiction (the '*Regulation for Complaints*' and '*Regulation for Discipline*' Policies). Such matters should be referred to the Students'

Union President or to another Senior Officer of the Students' Union if the complaint relates specifically to the conduct of the President.

#### **4. Disclosure and Confidentiality**

- 4.1 St. George's will deal with complaints discreetly, sensitively and in confidence wherever possible and only give people the information that is required to investigate and resolve the complaint properly. Where a complainant wishes to remain anonymous (i.e. through redaction or anonymisation of a report), St George's will endeavour to comply with this request but there may be circumstances in which a complaint cannot be taken forward anonymously.
- 4.2 The outcome of the Procedure will be communicated to anyone who has been deemed the subject of the complaint by the Student Conduct and Compliance Team, following the issue of the decision to the student.

#### **5. Advice and Support**

- 5.1 The Academic Registrar or his/her nominee is responsible for providing guidance to students and staff on the operation of the Student Concerns and Complaints Procedure. If this is not appropriate, a trained member of staff may provide guidance on the operation of this procedure.
- 5.2 The President or Vice-President (Education and Welfare) of the Students' Union will provide advice and guidance to students about raising concerns informally or formally. Students' Union Officers are able to assist students putting their concerns in writing and by suggesting evidence to include that substantiates their concerns. Students' Union Officers are also able to accompany students in a supportive capacity to meetings under the informal or formal stages of the Student Concerns and Complaints Procedure. Initial discussions with the Students' Union Officers of St George's will be treated as confidential and further action shall not be taken without the express permission of the complainant.
- 5.3 In instances where students wish to bring a complaint about the general standard or delivery of teaching or project supervision to attention of their Course Team, students should approach their Student Year Representatives without delay who are able to raise concerns through the appropriate Course Management Committee (see paragraph 7.3).
- 5.4 Where complaints relate to matters of discrimination, harassment or bullying from staff or other students, students may wish to seek guidance from a Personal Tutor, Students' Union Education & Welfare Support Officer or the Students' Union Vice-President (Education and Welfare). Reports of harassment and/or bullying by other students of St George's will be considered under this Procedure in accordance with the principles set out in the 'Dignity at Study Policy'. A review of any complaint involving assault or sexual assault will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the 'Assault and Sexual Assault Policy' which provides a framework under which St. George's will review complaints of this nature and details of the support available to both parties.

## **6. Behavioural Expectations**

- 6.1 Where students wish to bring a group concern, petition or complaint to the University, the complainants should nominate a spokesperson for the group with whom the University will address all correspondence under the Procedure. The spokesperson is responsible for consulting with the other complainants to represent the shared views of the group and is responsible for communicating the outcome of the complaint to the other complainants.
- 6.2 St George's will not allow the victimisation of complainants or their unfavourable treatment.
- 6.3 St George's recognises that complaints may be brought with mischievous or malicious intent, and that this intent may provide grounds for disciplinary action against individuals which may include suspension or expulsion.
- 6.4 In instances where complaints are raised anonymously, complainants should be aware that fair and effective investigation may be limited and may result in it not being possible to take action. St George's encourages complainants to give their name.
- 6.5 Complaints made to the University through a third party must be authorised in writing by the student complainant before any action can be taken in response.
- 6.6 Students are advised to respond to all communication from the University (verbal and written) directly and not normally through a third party except in exceptional circumstances where diagnosed disability reasonably prevents them from being able to do so.
- 6.7 Students are responsible for their own behaviour and that of any supporter or representative appointed by them to present their complaint to the University. Abusive or disrespectful behaviour towards University staff will not be tolerated under any circumstances and may result in internal procedures being brought to a close.

## **7. Initial Stage: Raising Concerns Informally or Semi-Formally**

- 7.1 As far as practicable, complaints should be handled at an informal or semi-formal level in order to resolve problems quickly and simply with the minimum of disruption to the individuals and St Georges main activities.
- 7.2 Staff and students are encouraged to retain notes from discussions at the informal and semi-formal stage of the procedures and record resolutions achieved at these stages.
- 7.3 Where a concern is raised about the general standard or delivery of teaching, students should approach their Student Representative in the first instance. Provision is made by each programme of study for student representation on the committee responsible for that programme of study. The Students' Union hold a list of elected Student Representatives.
- 7.4 Some matters, such as the failure of a teacher to attend a scheduled teaching session, will be dealt with at a semi-formal level by a designated member of staff. In this example, a "*Teacher Attendance Form*" (obtainable from the Registry or Students' Union Offices) should be completed by one student from the group concerned and returned to the member of the administrative staff named on the form.

Normally this member of staff will handle the complaint and steps will be taken as far as possible to arrange for the teaching to be delivered on an alternative date or other action as appropriate. Students may also wish to use the “*Educational Incident Form*” to notify St George’s of issues arising in the clinical setting which affect their educational experience.

- 7.5 It is also possible for notification to be sent to the Academic Registrar for investigation and possible semi-formal action. In such cases, the Chair of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee shall be informed of the complaint and, in consultation with the Committee if necessary, shall ensure that where the complaint is believed to be legitimate the steps taken to address it are appropriate and effective.
- 7.6 Students who wish to complain about a member of staff with regard to a specific action, behaviour or the performance of his or her professional duties in teaching, research, administration or a support role or about any aspect of a course or of St George’s provision and facilities are advised in the first instance, to seek the advice of the President or Vice-President (Education and Welfare) of the Students’ Union, who shall, if they consider it appropriate, suggest the member of staff to whom the matter should be referred for action.
- 7.7 Subject to the advice of the Student Officers of St George’s (see paragraph 7.6 above) and depending on the nature of the complaint, the complainant might approach directly the person who is the subject of, or responsible for the area of the complaint, or alternatively his or her Head of Department or Division, a Personal Tutor, a Dean, the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee or the Academic Registrar or other member of St George’s academic or administrative staff for help and advice in resolving the problem.

## **8. Secondary Stage: Raising Complaints Formally**

- 8.1 Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the Academic Registrar normally within three calendar months of the incident complained of. An extension to this timeframe may exceptionally be permitted at the discretion of the Principal.
- 8.2 Where a complaint cannot be resolved at the informal or semi-formal stages (paragraph 7), a student may make a formal complaint to the University. Unless circumstances are deemed to be exceptional, the University will not progress a formal complaint without evidence that the concern was raised earlier in accordance using the informal or semi-formal stage of this Procedure.
- 8.3 Formal complaints shall be made in writing using the “*Student Complaints Form*” and shall include a short, focused written statement of the nature and subject of the complaint and reasoning for why the matter could not be resolved under the informal or semi-formal procedures. All evidence on which the complaint is based must be submitted alongside the “*Student Complaints Form*” at the time the complaint is lodged. Complaints will not be progressed at the formal stage without a ‘*Student Complaints Form*’ being completed as this ensures that all relevant information relating to the complaint is captured in one place and that all necessary steps at the informal/semi-formal stage have been completed.
- 8.4 If the Academic Registrar or his/her nominee considers that a formal complaint is vexatious (i.e. brought with malicious intent), or frivolous (i.e. repetitive or burdensome), he or she may, either before or after appointing an Investigating

Officer, reject the complaint with reasons given in writing. Appeals of this decision may be made in accordance with paragraphs 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4 of this Procedure.

- 8.5 On receipt of a formal complaint, the Academic Registrar or his or her nominee shall firstly acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing and record the acknowledgement and secondly should appoint a senior member or officer of St George's previously unconnected with the case (the Investigating Officer). The Investigating Officer will be asked to confirm they have no conflicts of interests in the case. The Academic Registrar or their nominee, shall act as Clerk in this matter.
- 8.6 The Investigating Officer shall refer to and conduct his/her investigation in accordance with the "*Investigating Officer Protocol*". Save in exceptional circumstances, the Investigating Officer shall, within 15 working days of his or her appointment, prepare a detailed report for the Principal or his or her nominee on the circumstances with a recommendation for further action. A copy of the report shall normally be sent to the complainant, although the rights of any third party shall be protected, for example through anonymising of personal details. The Academic Registrar or his/her nominee should ensure that a 'delivery' or 'read' receipt is recorded.
- 8.7 The Principal or his/her nominee shall decide whether any further action is required under the terms of St George's disciplinary arrangements for staff or such other regulations that may be appropriate. The Principal or his/her nominee may delegate authority to take any action required to deal with a complaint to a senior officer of St George's, but in this case shall inform the complainant that this has been done. The Principal, his or her nominee, or the senior officer subsequently nominated to deal with the complaint shall, through the Academic Registrar or his/her nominee, inform the complainant in writing in general terms of the steps taken by St George's to address the complaint, including any appropriate remedial action. This shall normally be done within one month of the formal complaint being made. If a complaint cannot be investigated within this time, the complainant will be notified of that fact.
- 8.8 Where a formal complaint is found to be justified or partially justified but the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome or the student does not bring an appeal within the required timescale, a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued on the student's request. The Completion of Procedures letter will indicate how to make a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIAHE), and details are also available on the OIAHE's website ([www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)).

## **9. Appeal Stage**

- 9.1 A complainant who is not satisfied with the action taken and/or decision taken by the Principal or his/her nominee under the formal procedures (paragraph 8 above) may request the Chair of Council or his/her nominee to review the case and establish a Complaints Appeal Committee, if one or more of the grounds specified in paragraph 9.4 below apply.
- 9.2 A complainant may also make such a request if no action is taken under the formal procedures within three months of the complaint having been made.
- 9.3 Requests shall be in writing and addressed to the Director of Governance, Legal and Assurance Services within 10 working days of receipt of notification of the steps taken under the formal procedures. The Director of Governance, Legal and Assurance Services or his/her nominee shall act as Clerk for the appeal.

- 9.4 The Chair of Council or his/her nominee shall establish a Complaints Appeal Committee if she or he considers that one or more of the following grounds applies:
- a) there is relevant and substantial new evidence available which could not reasonably have been brought to the attention of the Investigating Officer or Principal at an earlier stage
  - b) there has been a procedural irregularity during the operation of the earlier stage of this Procedure of sufficient weight to suggest that the outcome would not have been the same had it not occurred;
  - c) the decision of the Principal or his/her nominee was manifestly unreasonable.
- 9.5 In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of Council or his/her nominee may decide to refer the complaint back to the secondary formal stage of the procedure where it is considered that further investigation of the complaint is required. It may be necessary for this process to be put on hold in line with paragraph 1.5 where another procedure is already in operation.
- 9.6 Any action taken by the Chair of Council or his/her nominee shall be delayed if necessary by the exigencies of the complainant's course timetable such that the complainant is enabled to make appropriate and comprehensive representations.
- 9.7 The Chair of Council or his/her nominee may, if she or he believes the circumstances warrant it, appoint a Complaints Appeal Committee to investigate the original complaint and the action taken under the formal procedures, and to determine whether remedial action is justified.
- 9.8 The Director of Governance, Legal and Assurance Services or his/her nominee shall notify the complainant and the Academic Registrar in writing of the Chair of Council or his/her nominee's decision, giving reasons where it has been decided that no Complaints Appeal Committee shall be appointed.
- 9.9 If the Chair of Council or his/her nominee decides not to appoint a Complaints Appeal Committee, the Academic Registrar or his/her nominee shall advise the student in writing of this decision and shall issue a Completion of Procedures (CoP) letter, usually within 20 working days of the receipt of the appeal.
- 9.10 A Complaints Appeal Committee shall consist of:
- (i) A member of the Council not being a person employed by St George's who shall be appointed to the Chair;
  - (ii) a second member of the Council who may or may not be a person employed by St George's;
  - (iii) a member of Academic Staff not being a member of the Council and not previously concerned with the complaint who shall be appointed by the Chair of the Senate under powers delegated by Senate.

The Director of Governance, Legal and Assurance Services or his/her nominee shall be clerk to the Committee.

- 9.11 The clerk to the Committee shall notify the complainant and the person originally complained against (or relevant officer of St George's where a complaint is about provision of a facility or service) – hereafter called the parties – of the nature of the complaint, the identity of the Committee members and the date of the proposed hearing. Both parties shall be allowed at least 10 working days in which to prepare their case. All information on which the parties intend to rely must be made available

to the other party and to the members of the Committee at least 5 working days before the date set for the hearing.

- 9.12 The parties will be required to attend the hearing either in person or remotely. If either party fails to attend without reasonable explanation, the Committee may consider the case in their absence. The Chair will have discretion as to what constitutes a 'reasonable explanation'.
- 9.13 The parties shall each have the right to be accompanied by a friend, relative, colleague, Students' Union officer or other representative. Members of staff, students and others relevant to the case may be asked to give evidence to the hearing by either party. The Committee may also call upon other persons (whether or not a current member of St George's) to provide advice on specific aspects of the case in writing or in person.
- 9.14 The Complaints Appeal Committee hearing shall be conducted as a formal committee rather than as a quasi-judicial hearing. The Committee members shall take the leading role in asking questions and the Chair shall have discretion to allow flexibility in procedures aimed at ensuring that all parties are able to present their arguments and evidence, and the Committee members have a full and fair understanding of these. The detailed procedure for the hearing shall be at the discretion of the Chair, but shall include provision for: an initial private meeting of the Committee members, explaining the procedures to be followed; introducing those present and their role; explaining the powers of the Committee; allowing each party to make a statement and call witnesses; other persons (as referred to in paragraph 9.11) to make a statement; questions to be asked of the parties, witnesses and other persons by Committee members; discretion by the Chair to allow reciprocal questioning by the parties. The meeting will be held either in person or remotely.
- 9.15 At the conclusion of the presentation of statements and evidence, all persons except members of the Committee shall withdraw, except that the clerk to the Committee may attend to give procedural advice, which will be recorded in the Committee's report. The members of the Complaints Appeal Committee shall deliberate on their conclusions and shall produce a written report, giving reasons for any decisions, including any appropriate remedial action or any recommendations to Council for further action under St George's disciplinary arrangements for staff or students. This shall be sent in writing to the parties and the Academic Registrar within 10 working days of the date on which the Committee met, and also to the Chair of Council for formal report to the next meeting of Council.
- 9.16 The decision of the Complaints Appeal Committee on behalf of the Council, including any action taken by Council on any recommendations of the Complaints Appeal Committee, shall be final and shall conclude St George's internal Complaints Procedure. The Director of Governance, Legal and Assurance Services or his/her nominee shall issue a Completion of Procedures (CoP) letter within 10 working days of this decision being taken.
- 9.17 The Complaints Appeal Committee shall normally reach its decision within three months of the application to the Director of Governance, Legal and Assurance Services.

## **10 Record Keeping**

- 10.1 The University is committed to continuous improvement and constructive handling of any complaints, taking reasonable action to ensure that similar situations do not re-



occur. Complaints shall be monitored to identify trends, areas of good practice and where improvements could be made.

- 10.2 Academic and administrative staff are advised to document carefully where concerns and complaints have been raised at the informal and semi-formal stage of the procedure and place their records on the student's personal file. A log of the number and category of informal and semi-formal complaints should be kept by the Course Team and reported in the Annual Monitoring Report
- 10.3 The Student Conduct and Compliance Team will submit an annual report on Student Complaints to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Recommendations from this report shall be used to enhance the quality of the student experience by informing the future development of University practices, procedures and activities. Monitoring reports will not contain any personally identifiable information. Completion of the recommendations will be monitored by QAEC.
- 10.4 Observations raised in the Annual Report from Student Conduct and Compliance should be supported by University Committees and should include action plans to deliver service improvements tied to recommendations and actions with owners and deadlines.

*\*These procedures will not be invalidated if the role title named in the procedure has changed or a nominee acts in the place of another named in the procedure.*