

**Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Tamhlacht
Institute of Technology Tallaght, Dublin**

Student Complaints Procedures

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this procedure is to provide students with a process through which they can have complaints regarding the Institute and its employees, students or facilities addressed in a meaningful and constructive way. For the purposes of this procedure, a 'complaint' is defined as any specific concern about the provision of a programme of study or a related service/facility.

The favoured avenue for complaint resolution is informally between the individuals directly involved. However, for a variety of reasons complaints may not always be resolved through informal channels and the Institute's formal complaints procedure provides a mechanism to address this eventuality.

2. Scope of Procedures

The Student Complaints procedure deals with complaints that cannot be dealt with under any other structure; therefore this procedure does not cover

- Examination appeals for which there is a separate procedure. The procedure is outlined in the *Student Handbook*.
- Complaints specific to students registered on Research Degree Programmes - these are outlined in section 3.7 and Appendix J of the *Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes*.
- General student disciplinary matters which are covered by the Institute's *Disciplinary Code of Practice* - this is elaborated in the *Student Handbook*.
- Bullying and Harassment issues which are governed by the Institute's policy and regulations on *Bullying and Harassment*.

3. General Principles

In implementing this procedure the Institute Management is committed to ensuring that both the interests of students and those of staff are safeguarded. In particular, it is recognised as essential that:

- Complaints from students are handled in all instances, in so far as is possible, in a co-operative rather than an adversarial way. Towards this end every effort will be made in each instance to arrive at a solution by consensus among the relevant parties.
- Complaints are at all times handled in a sensitive and confidential manner, with due recognition of the personal implications for both students and members of staff involved.
- Students will not be disadvantaged because they make a complaint
- The reputations and professional integrity of members of staff of the Institute are protected from unsubstantiated complaints.
- Prejudiced responses to complaints, by way of comment or otherwise, are avoided at all times particularly by those to whom formal complaints are made in the first instance.
- Academic standards are safeguarded at all times from being undermined by any misuse or mishandling of the complaints procedure.
- The principles of natural justice are applied when dealing with complaints i.e. all parties to a complaint have the right to be heard; all relevant submissions and evidence will be considered; matters that are not relevant shall not be taken into account; and the decision-maker(s) will not be biased.

- There will be full disclosure of any records maintained within the Institute of complaints involving staff members to the staff member concerned.

In the event that it is determined that a complaint is made which is unfounded and of malicious intent, the complainant may be referred to the Institute's Board of Enquiry in accordance with the Institute's Disciplinary Code of Practice, to establish whether the student is in breach of Institute regulations, in which case the student may be liable to suspension, expulsion or such other penalty as decided.

Complaints can provide an important source of feedback on the performance of the Institute's services and members. As such the Institute will monitor the registration of complaints and the progress towards resolution. The Registrar will include a section on complaints in a report to the Senior Management Team to ensure complaint trends are monitored and that relevant quality issues are identified and addressed. Information that would identify any of the parties involved will not be included in this report.

4. Stages in the Complaints Process

Before making a formal complaint, a student should first try to resolve the issue informally with the person who is the subject of their complaint or with the immediate manager/supervisor of the service. This can be done in person or through the Class Representative or Students' Union. Students may also seek the advice of another staff member, Class Tutor or Programme Leader, as appropriate.

There may be occasions when several students wish to make a joint complaint about a problem. In these circumstances, it may be appropriate to ask the class representative to speak on their behalf or to nominate a student representative to act as spokesperson. Students also have the option of

consulting the Students' Union and asking a Student Union Officer to act on their behalf.

A complainant is entitled to be accompanied at all stages of the complaints process by a person of his or her choosing.

4.1 Stage 1: Informal Process

This preliminary stage will generally be an oral process and a formal, written record will not be made. If the complaint is not resolved then the complainant may proceed to Stage 2 of the Student Complaints Procedure (as outlined in section 4.2) if the complainant so wishes. The relevant Head of School/Department/Students' Union Officer will explain to the complainant the operation of the remaining stages of the Student Complaints Procedure.

The Institute appreciates that there may be occasions where Stage 1 is inappropriate and/or that a more formal approach is necessary. In such circumstances, the complainant may proceed directly to Stage 2 of the Student Complaints process (outlined below).

4.2 Stage 2: Formal Process

If the complaint is not resolved informally, the student/class representative/Students' Union Officer should complete a Student Complaint Form (Appendix 1). This form can be obtained from the School Office or the Students' Union. The completed Student Complaint Form should be forwarded to the student's Head of School/Department or to the relevant Manager in the functional area (e.g. Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager, Estates Manager, Librarian, IT Manager). The complaint should be specific and comprehensively documented.

Table 1 provides a summary of some of the types of complaints that may arise and how they should be dealt with. The procedures (both informal and formal) for dealing with each category of complaint are then elaborated in section 5.

Table 1 Summary of Types of Complaint

Category of Complaint		Issues	Origin	Initially Dealt with by:
A	Subject/ Module	subject difficult; style/pace of delivery; textbooks; format/content of continuous assessments and subject examinations; facilities; coverage of syllabus; perceived subject difficulty; style/pace of delivery; health and safety	Individual, Class Rep(s), Student Union Officer	Lecturer
B.	Programme	general course issues; course workload; timetabling; course facilities (classroom, laboratory, workshop, library, computers); health and safety; textbooks; procedures, rules and guidelines for continuous assessments/assignments; course examinations; scheduling of continuous assessments, projects and other assignments; student work placement; learning supports	Individual, Class Rep(s), or Student Union Officer	Lecturer/Class Tutor/Programme Leader; Head of Department; Programme Board
C.	Student Services and facilities	General facilities and service provision e.g. canteen; library; computer laboratories; parking; academic services; admissions; registration; conferring; examinations; grants; fees; administration of student support services; health centre; disability; access; chaplaincy; counselling, accommodation; sports and recreation; societies	Individual, Class Rep(s), or Students' Union Officer	Staff member, Appropriate Manager or Head of Department
D.	Personal (Student/Staff)	Staff member - poor attendance; inappropriate behaviour/comments; lack of courtesy/respect; poor delivery of service	Individual, Class rep(s) or Students' Union Officer	Staff member, Head of Department; Appropriate Manager

5. Complaints Procedures

This section outlines the procedures to be followed for each of the categories A, B, C and D, identified in Table 1.

5.1 Category A - Specific Subject/Module

The following procedure is to be followed for complaints that fall within this category:

1. The individual/class representative(s)/Students' Union Officer will request a meeting with the lecturer to discuss the matter. This meeting should be constructive, with a view to resolving the matter.
2. Where a resolution is not possible the individual/class representative(s)/ Students' Union Officer will arrange a meeting with the Head of Department through the School Secretary, usually within three days.
3. The Head of Department will normally arrange meetings within three working days to discuss the matter informally with the staff member.
4. If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant(s) may complete a Student Complaint Form (Appendix 1) and submit it to the Head of Department.
5. The Head of Department may then initiate a series of meetings with the lecturer and the complainant(s) in an effort to resolve the issue satisfactorily. Such meetings should normally be completed within ten working days and the following procedures apply:
 - Reference should be made to the course documentation as part of this process.

- Both complainant(s) and staff member may elect to have their Union representative or a third party present at such meetings.
 - The Head of Department should retain records of such meetings, agreed and signed by both parties, and made available to each party.
6. Where the problem is resolved the Head of Department should complete the Response to Student Complaint Form (Appendix 2).
 7. Where the issue is not resolved, the Head of Department will refer the matter to the Head of School who will arrange a meeting within three working days to discuss the matter with the staff member.
 8. If the issue is still not resolved, the Head of School and the Lecturer will meet with a view to referring the matter to an agreed third party for consideration. The third party may be another Head of School/Department or another appropriate person, as determined by the Head of School. All records will be made available to the third party. The Lecturer shall consult with the third party with a view to arriving at an agreed solution. This process should normally be completed within ten working days. The complainant(s) may also consult with the third party if s(he)/they so wish. Where the issue is resolved, the Head of School should complete the Response to Student Complaint Form (Appendix 2).
 9. Where the decision is not acceptable to the complainant(s) and insofar as the complainant(s) maintain that not all of the facts/relevant information were considered in arriving at the decision, the issue may be referred by the student(s) to the Students Complaints Board (Appendix 3).

10. Both the complainant and lecturer will be advised in writing of the outcome.

5.2 Category B - Programme Issues

Where the complaint relates to general programme issues such as course workload and timetabling, the individual/class representative(s)/Students' Union Officer may request a meeting with the Head of Department to discuss the issue informally. Where the problem is not resolved informally, the following procedure may be followed.

1. The complainant(s) will submit the Student Complaint Form (Appendix 1) to the Head of Department to be included as an agenda item three working days in advance of the appropriate Programme Board meeting.
2. The matter will be processed through the next Programme Board meeting, in accordance with the agreed protocols for discussion of such items.
3. Where the complaint is resolved, the Head Department should complete Response to Student Complaint Form (Appendix 2) and inform the complainant(s) of the outcome.
4. Where the decision is not acceptable to the complainant(s) and insofar as the complainant(s) maintain that not all of the facts/relevant information were considered in arriving at the decision, the issue may be referred by the student(s) to the Students Complaints Board (Appendix 3).

5.3 Category C - Student Services/Facilities

Category C complaints (which relate to student services or facilities) are initially dealt with by the appropriate Manager (e.g. the Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager, Finance Manager, Estates Manager, Librarian and IT Manager).

The procedure to be followed is as follows:

1. An individual/class representative(s) may request the Students' Union to act on her/his behalf.
2. The individual/class representative(s)/Students' Union will request a meeting with the relevant Manager through the appropriate office to discuss the matter. This meeting should normally be held within three working days. The discussion should be constructive, with a view to resolving the issue.
3. The appropriate Manager will take relevant steps where possible to address the complaint informally and inform the complainant(s) of the outcome.
4. Where a complaint relating to a service/facility remains unresolved, the complainant(s) may submit a Student Complaint Form (Appendix 1) and the appropriate Manager will place the item on the agenda of the next relevant committee meeting (where such exists). The matter may also be referred by the Manager to the appropriate member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) i.e. to the Secretary/Financial Controller (in the case of Human Resources and Finance), to the Head of Development (in the case of Estates), or to the Registrar (in the case of Academic Administration and Student Services, the Library and IT facilities). If the issue is resolved, the Response to Students Complaint Form (Appendix 2) will be completed and the complainant(s) will be informed.

5. If the outcome is not acceptable to the complainant(s) and insofar as the complainant(s) maintain that not all of the facts/relevant information was taken into consideration in arriving at the decision, the matter may be referred by the student(s) to the Student Complaints Board (Appendix 3).

5.4 Category D - Personal (Student/Staff)

Where a complaint relates to a complaint by a student in relation to an academic member of staff,¹ the individual/class representative(s)/Students' Union Officer may request a meeting with the lecturer to discuss the matter informally. This meeting should be constructive, with a view to resolving the matter. If the issue remains unresolved and/or if in the opinion of the complainant(s) Stage 1 (informal) is inappropriate and a formal approach is deemed necessary, the procedures outlined in 1-6 below will apply.

1. The individual/class representative(s)/Students' Union Officer will arrange a meeting with the Head of Department to discuss the matter.
2. The Head of Department will notify the staff member of the complaint. He or she will then arrange to meet the complainant(s) and the staff member (separately) to discuss the matter informally. The discussions should be constructive with a view to resolving the issue.
3. If the issue is not resolved, the complainant(s) may submit a Student Complaint Form (Appendix 1) and the matter will be referred to the Head of School. The Head of School will then initiate a series of meetings with the staff member and student(s) in an effort to resolve

¹Where a complaint relates to a non-academic member of staff, it will be referred to the appropriate Manager (e.g. Finance Manager, Estates Manager, Librarian and IT Manager) and the appropriate Manager will replace the Head of School/Department in procedures 1- 6.

the issue satisfactorily; this should normally be completed within ten working days.

4. The Head of School will retain the minutes of such meetings, agreed and signed by both parties, and a copy will be given to each party. The individual/class representative(s) or staff member may elect to have their Union representative present at such meetings. Where the issue is resolved, the Head of School will complete a Response to Student Complaint Form (Appendix 2).
5. Where agreement is not reached, the Head of School and the Lecturer will meet with a view to referring the matter to an agreed third party for consideration. The Lecturer shall consult with the third party with a view to arriving at an agreed solution. The complainant(s) may also consult with the third party if s(he)/they so wish. This process should normally be completed within ten working days. Where the issue is resolved, the Head of School will complete the Response to Student Complaint Form (Appendix 2).
6. If the issue is not resolved, the Head of School will refer the matter to Personnel or to the Student Complaints Board (Appendix 3), as appropriate.

6. Reporting & Records

Each Head of School/Department/Manager will prepare annually a summary of complaints handled during the academic year. A complaint will only be reported if it has been received in writing by the above persons i.e. it is a formal, Stage 2 complaint.

The summary report will include the following:

- Name of School/Department/Function
- Number of complaints received
- Nature of complaints by category
- Status of Complaints (number resolved; origins; not resolved)
- General Comments/Recommendations

The report will be forwarded to the Registrar who will collate the information and present it to the Senior Management Team, along with a similar report from the Student Complaints Board.

Records of meetings will be retained by the Head of School/Department/Manager for a period of five years. The parties involved will have access to records of meetings at which they were present.

Records will be made available to others only insofar as noted in these procedures for further processing of the complaint e.g. by the Student Complaints Board.

Where a complaint is of a serious nature the Head of School/Department will notify the Senior Management Team of the general circumstances of the complaint, as soon as is practicable.

Appendix 1 - Student Complaint Form

A student completing the Student Complaint Form should consult the Student Complaints Procedure. This form should only be completed by students who wish to pursue a complaint beyond Stage I of the Institute's Student Complaints Procedure. At this point the relevant Head of School/Department or Manager should have explained the remaining stages of the complaints procedure to you.

Student's Details
Name:
Registration Number:
School/Department:
Programme:
Full-time/Part-time
Year:
Preferred contact address:
Email:
Telephone:
Category of complaint (A, B, C or D):

Please outline the nature of the complaint.

The complaint should be specific and well documented and include dates, locations and witnesses as appropriate.

Please outline previous efforts to resolve the matter - at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure.

How would you like the complaint resolved?

Signed:

Date:

Please return the completed Complaint Form to the Head of School/ Department or Manager as appropriate.

Appendix 2 - Response to Student Complaint Form

To be completed by the Head of School/Department, Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager or Manager as appropriate.

Date of complaint received from student:

Outcome:

Action taken:

Please (i) inform the student in writing of the outcome of your investigation of their complaint and attach a copy to this form and (ii) forward a copy of this form to the Registrar's Office and keep a copy on your own file.

Recorded by:

Date:

Appendix 3 - Student Complaints Board

Membership

The Student Complaints Appeals Board consists of:

- Two nominees of the Director (e.g. the Registrar, Financial Controller, Head of Development, a Head of School or Head of Department) who has not been involved in earlier stages of the process. The Director may nominate an external person, where this is deemed appropriate
- Two members of staff from a panel of eight nominated by the Academic Council
- Students' Union President or nominee of the President

A person shall not be a member of the Board who has previously been involved in the matter under consideration.

Function

To investigate unresolved student complaints referred to it in accordance with the Institute's Student Complaints Procedure.

Operation

The Board shall consider the relevant documentation and shall invite the parties to the complaint to make a presentation to the Board. The Board may also involve such other persons as it deems necessary. Decisions of the Board are final within the Institute.