



2024-25

## **Student Complaints Policy & Procedure**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. In line with the UK's Quality Code for Higher Education, the Office for the Independent Adjudicator, and allied guides, our definition of a 'complaint' is the expression of a specific concern about the provision of a programme/module, or a programme of study, or a related School service.
- 1.2. Central Film School defines an 'academic appeal' as a student request for a review of a decision made within or procedure mandated by the Academic Board and assessment boards structure which is charged with decisions on student progression, assessment and awards. For academic appeals, please refer to the [Academic Appeals Policy](#).
- 1.3. CFS recognises that complaints may be made by individuals or, in some circumstances, a group of students. Complaints may be dealt with effectively through informal means in the earlier stages; later stages will be dealt with formally.
- 1.4. CFS will aim to resolve any complaints in a timely way and bring matters to a conclusion as speedily as possible. The following procedures, therefore, give timescales that are both fair and realistic and have sufficient flexibility to take individual circumstances into account.
- 1.5. In order to avoid students feeling inhibited from making a complaint due to fear that they may suffer disadvantage, CFS maintains confidentiality when receiving or handling a complaint, unless disclosure is necessary to enable the complaint to be progressed.

- 1.6. Where this is the case, we will inform the person(s) complaining before any disclosure is made and check that they wish to proceed before doing so.
- 1.7. Complainants can be supported, advised, and accompanied by a third party at any stage of the Complaints procedure. Complainants can seek advice from their Student Representative or the Student Council and [Citizens Advice](#).
- 1.8. The School's relationship is with you as a student, irrespective of who pays your fees. As such, the School will not deal with a third-party appeal made on your behalf unless there is a valid reason, for example, a reasonable adjustment for a diagnosed disability.
- 1.9. In cases where a third-party appeal is appropriate, you will be required to complete a Third-Party Consent Form in order to formally authorise a third party (such as a parent or guardian, carer, spouse or significant other) to act on your behalf.
- 1.10. Where a Third Party Consent Form is received, the School will only correspond with the individual authorised to act on your behalf.

## **2. Early Resolution**

- 2.1. Central Film School encourages all students to raise any causes for concern they may have at the earliest opportunity. Most issues can normally be resolved quickly within the related department, without need for escalation to the other stages.
- 2.2. Students wishing to discuss an issue are invited to speak with the relevant team or department, in the first instance, or the Student Services Team. Where appropriate, and where the student feels comfortable, this should usually include the member of staff closest to the issue or the area/department relating to the issue.
- 2.3. During discussion with the student, the member of staff will seek to remedy the issue or advise that the issue should be escalated to further stages. It may be possible to resolve the concern by providing an explanation of why the issue occurred and/or (where appropriate) an apology and an explanation of what will be done to stop a similar situation happening in the future.
- 2.4. Should the student not accept the proposed remedy at the Early Resolution stage, they may choose to raise the complaint as outlined below.

### 3. Stage 1: Informal Complaint

- 3.1. Stage 1 complaints should be submitted using the **Stage 1 Complaint Form** within 1 month of the incident, event or series of events that has given rise to the complaint.
- 3.2. Complaints received outside of this timescale will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Justification for submitting the complaint outside of this timescale should be provided in the Complaint Form.
- 3.3. Accessibility requirements will be taken into account and reasonable adjustments made if the complaint needs to be made in an alternative format. Students are advised to discuss this with the Student Services Team.
- 3.4. The complaints form must be completed in its entirety and will ask students to detail:
  - The causes for concern and/or the issues which have led to the complaint;
  - The requested outcome or resolution sought
  - Any supporting evidence/ documentation relevant to the complaint.
  - Details of any early resolution sought and/or offered.
- 3.5. The Student Services Team will confirm receipt of the complaint within 10 working days of submission. Students are encouraged to follow up if they haven't received confirmation within this time, to check they have submitted their form to the correct email address.
- 3.6. Where a complaint involves alleged misconduct of a Central Film School student, it may be handled under the [Non-Academic Disciplinary Procedures](#). In some instances it may be necessary to make this referral at Stage 1, for example, when the allegation is considered to be serious, but a student does not wish to put their complaint in writing.
- 3.7. After receiving a Stage 1 complaint, the Student Services Coordinator (or designated nominee) will seek to resolve the issue with the student directly and those involved. Actions can include:
  - Follow up meetings to discuss the issue further and possible resolutions

- Follow up meetings with another relevant department (for example, if the initial complaint was about an issue with one of their modules).
  - Mediation meetings between the parties involved (if the complaint was made about another student or students.)
- 3.8. Any resolutions and actions that are agreed with the student should be communicated to the student in writing, by email, within 10 working days of the initial meeting or discussion. The email should summarise the complaint, include notes of the discussion between the complainant and the member of staff, and the proposed resolution or actions taken.
- 3.9. If appropriate, the Student Services Coordinator should seek to follow up with the complainant (and other parties involved) after an agreed resolution to assess if any further action is required.
- 3.10. Should the student not accept the proposed resolution at Stage 1, they may choose to raise the complaint as outlined below.

#### **4. Stage 2: Formal Complaint**

- 4.1. Formal complaints should be submitted using the **Stage 2 Complaint Form** within 10 working days of completion of Stage 1.
- 4.2. Complaints received outside of this timescale will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Justification for submitting the complaint outside of this timescale should be provided in the Stage 2 Complaint Form.
- 4.3. If you submit the Stage 2 Complaint Form outside of this timescale and do not evidence a valid reason for this, you will be provided with a Completion of Procedures letter.
- 4.4. The Senior Registry & Quality Manager (or Designated Nominee) will confirm receipt of the complaint within 10 working days of submission. Students are encouraged to follow up if they haven't received confirmation within this time, to check they have submitted their form to the correct email address.
- 4.5. If required, the Senior Registry & Quality Manager (or Designated Nominee) will appoint an appropriate Investigating Officer for the case. The investigation may include:
- review of relevant documentation including the Complaint Form and notes of early resolution meetings, mediations, or discussions.
  - review of communication sent and received including emails or posts on the VLE.

- meetings or interviews with the complainant and other students involved.
  - meetings or interviews with relevant staff.
- 4.6. Following the investigation, the Investigating Officer will provide their report to the Senior Registry & Quality Manager.
- 4.7. After conclusion of the investigation, or if an investigation was not necessary, the Senior Registry & Quality Manager will Chair and convene a Complaints Panel. The panel will comprise of:
- Chair - Senior Registry & Quality Manager or designated nominee
  - 2 members of Central Film School Staff (who have had no previous involvement in the case).
- 4.8. A date for the panel meeting will be communicated to the student including all written information that will be discussed.
- 4.9. If the complaint is about another individual, they will be allowed a 'right of reply' and will be invited to present their response to the panel meeting. The complainant will also be able to provide further context to the panel but will **not** be able to provide further evidence.
- 4.10. After the conclusion of the meeting, the panel shall determine one of the following outcomes:
- there is a reasonable justification for the complaint(s) in which case the panel will consider appropriate actions or resolutions (this may be the outcome sought by the complainant). If the complaint(s) were about a member of staff or another student it may not be possible to disclose to the complainant the full nature of the redress taken due to employment/data protection legislation);
- OR**
- there is no reasonable justification for the complaint and that it be dismissed.
- 4.11. The Chair will communicate the outcome to the student, in writing, detailing the investigation process and Panel decision.
- 4.12. Students will normally receive an outcome within 20 working days of submitting their Stage 2 complaint. Should this timeline need to be extended, the Senior Registry & Quality Manager will inform the student as soon as possible and frequently update the student on the progress of their complaint.

## 5. Stage 3: Review

- 5.1. A student who considers that their complaint has not been given full and proper consideration can request a review of their concern(s). Any request for a review should be made within 10 working days of receiving the outcome of the complaint panel meeting.
- 5.2. A student may request a review on one or more of the following grounds:
  - there has been a material procedural irregularity which has demonstrably affected the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint.
  - there is material new evidence which the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide when the Stage 2 complaint was made and which would have significantly affected the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint.
- 5.3. The student will need to make a formal request for a review using the Complaint Review Form. This will then be forwarded to the CEO. This form will detail:
  - which of the three grounds for a review the complainant wishes the review to be held under and provide evidence that a review is justified;
  - include a copy of the Stage 2 complaint, evidence and outcome provided
  - the remedy sought;
- 5.4. Upon receipt of a request for a review from the complainant, the CEO should:
  - write to the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the request for a review;
  - inform the complainant when they might expect to hear the outcome of the review, which should normally be within 10 working days;
  - undertake a review of all the evidence and documents supplied by the complainant and by the Complaints Panel.
- 5.5. The CEO reserves the right to ask one or more members of School staff to assist in the review.
- 5.6. Having completed the review, the CEO will decide:
  - that the student's complaint was justified and shall arrange for its redress (if the complaint/s were about a member of staff or another student it may not be possible to disclose

to the complainant the full nature of the redress taken due to employment/data protection legislation)

OR

- that parts of the complaint were justified and shall arrange for the redress of these aspects (if the complaint/s were about a member of staff or another student it may not be possible to disclose to the complainant the full nature of the redress taken due to employment/data protection legislation)

OR

- that the complaint was not justified and be dismissed.

- 5.7. The CEO will then contact the student and inform them of the decision and arrange for a Completion of Procedures Letter to be issued to the student.
- 5.8. Exceptionally, where the complaint concerns academic standards (e.g. the quality of teaching), the CEO may decide to refer the complaint to the awarding body (currently Falmouth University) under Step 3 of its Complaints Procedure. You will be notified of this decision in writing and, in such cases, the awarding body will issue the Completion of Procedures letter.
- 5.9. All students have the right to take their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). Once a Completion of Procedures Letter has been issued, a student may apply for external review of their concern by the OIA, in accordance with the OIA's scheme.

## **6. Office of the Independent Adjudicator**

- 6.1. Following the outcome of the review stage, the complainant may choose to submit the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for independent review.
- 6.2. Information to help the student decide whether or not to submit to the OIA will be provided in the Completion of Procedures letter.
- 6.3. Complaints can normally only be submitted to the OIA once a Completion of Procedures has been issued.
- 6.4. Full information and eligibility details can be found at <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>.

<b>Document Title:</b>	CFS Student Complaints Policy & Procedure
<b>Document Ref:</b>	CFSSCP_05
<b>Version:</b>	5.0
<b>Issuing Authority:</b>	CFS Academic Board
<b>Owner:</b>	Student Experience Committee
<b>Author:</b>	Michael Ellery
<b>Document Approval Date:</b>	27/08/2024
<b>Last Amended:</b>	27/06/2024
<b>Sensitivity:</b>	Unclassified
<b>Effective from:</b>	August prior to the 2024/2025 Academic Year
<b>Review Date:</b>	Prior to 2025/2026 Academic Year
<b>History:</b>	First Published: 14/05/2017 Reviewed: September 2021 Reviewed: September 2022 Reviewed: August 2023