



WAVERLEY ABBEY  
COLLEGE

# Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure

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# Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure

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## 1. Introduction: aims and purpose of the document

This policy is underpinned by the 'Statement of Vision, Mission and Values' of the College, available online or within the policy documents handbook, and should be read and understood in the context of that statement.

This policy is available in the Programme Handbook and on the student portal (Moodle). The Policy should be read in conjunction with Middlesex University regulations (available on line at <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/policies/university-regulations>).

Waverley Abbey College aims to offer quality in all its activities and provide students with an excellent learning experience; however, the College recognises that there are occasions where the student may feel that the high level of education or service is less than might be expected, in such circumstances the College aims to:

- 1.1. provide a clear, simple and accessible means by which students can bring matters of concern relating to their learning experience to the attention of the College, which is fair to all parties;
- 1.2. provide a staged complaint or appeals procedure. This is to allow the student and the person(s) concerned to resolve the issue informally where possible. If this does not prove satisfactory the student may make a formal complaint or appeal as outlined in this document;
- 1.3. make sure that complaints and appeals are handled sensitively and with regard to confidentiality;
- 1.4. handle complaints and appeals speedily as is consistent with the complexity of the issue and the availability of relevant staff to respond. To indicate clearly where there are time limits within which students are normally expected to submit a complaint or appeal;
- 1.5. allow each party an equal opportunity to present their case and to give clear reasons for decisions;
- 1.6. allow a student to make a complaint or appeal with the support of a third party, eg a friend or an adviser.
- 1.7. ensure that decisions related to student complaints and appeals are taken by people without actual or perceived conflicts of interest;
- 1.8. ensure that a student who brings a genuine appeal under this procedure is not disadvantaged in their continuing studies<sup>1</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> QAA Code/B9/Ind. 1)

- 1.9. notify the student in writing of the outcome of the appeals procedure as soon as possible;
- 1.10. complete the process by issuing a Completion of Procedures letter with advice about the student's entitlement to apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), the independent ombudsman service of last resort. The student can ask the OIA to review the outcome of the College and university's complaints and academic appeals process. The request should normally be submitted within twelve months of the date of issue of the Completion of Procedures letter<sup>2</sup>.

## **2. Student complaints and academic appeals**

The following paragraphs set out the procedures that students should follow if they have any individual complaints or concerns, or wish to lodge an appeal against an academic decision. If there are concerns affecting the student body more generally, these should be raised with the student representatives on the Programme Boards, as set out in the relevant sections in the student programme handbook.

### **2.1 Complaints and academic appeals are defined as follows:**

2.1.1. **Complaints** – a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about standards of service offered by the College. This includes facilities, accommodation services or behaviours, action or lack of action by the College;

2.1.2. **Academic appeals** – an academic appeal is defined as a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progress, assessment and awards.

### **2.2 Procedures for handling complaints and appeals**

Procedures for handling complaints, appeals or difficulties arising in the context of fieldwork, whether arising from the student, the client or the supervisor, are set out fully in the Fieldwork Document and in the Waverley Abbey College Placement Policy.

Because the Waverley Abbey College Faculty is relatively small, there will be occasions when the same faculty member has two roles. If formal complaints or appeals are to be made in such circumstances (i.e. the procedures followed beyond the initial stage of informal discussion), the student should first contact the Programme Convener or the Director of Higher Education to agree a satisfactory process for handling the complaint or appeal in question. At the end of each

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<sup>2</sup> QAA Code/B9/Ind. 5 and 6

teaching week/weekend, students are invited to fill in a quality evaluation form, covering both academic and non-academic matters. It is hoped that most concerns can be dealt with by following up that feedback, but the following procedures are in place for those not satisfactorily resolved in that manner.

### 3. Student complaints: non-academic<sup>3</sup>

A non-academic complaint refers to the concerns and complaints a student may have regarding the provision of non-teaching services: eg the maintenance of its buildings, the quality of bedroom services, catering, administration, conduct of House staff, etc. Waverley Abbey College handles all such complaints, without reference to the University, according to the following procedures<sup>4</sup>:

3.1. **Informal discussion:** in the first instance, complaints should be discussed informally with the Year Leader or tutor, who will involve the Programme Administrator as needed. Hopefully, the majority of complaints can be dealt with through this informal process.

3.2. **Lodging a formal complaint:** if the student is not satisfied with the outcome, s/he may make a formal complaint to the Waverley Operations Manager. (Any complaints of serious misconduct by staff should always be made formally and directly to the Waverley Operations Manager.) The student will receive a written response.

3.3. **Pursuing a formal complaint:** if still unsatisfied with the outcome, the student may request a formal face-to-face meeting with the Director of Higher Education or the Finance Director who will consider the student's concerns carefully, and reply in writing. Their response will be final.

3.4. **OIA:** The student can ask the OIA to review the outcome of the College and University's complaints and academic appeals process. The request for review should normally be submitted within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.

### 4. Student complaints: academic

An academic complaint refers to the concerns or complaints a student may have regarding the provision of the BA and MA programmes: eg student support and guidance, learning resources, conduct of Waverley faculty and staff supporting the programme, etc. There is a separate process (see below) for handling appeals against academic decisions (marking, plagiarism, terminations etc). In general, Waverley Abbey College handles all

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<sup>3</sup> QAA Code/B9/Ind. 4

<sup>4</sup> QAA Code/B9/Ind. 2

academic complaints, but there is provision for a final appeal to University, as in the following procedures<sup>5</sup>:

- 4.1 Informal discussion:** in the first instance, unless it is a matter of serious professional misconduct, concerns should be raised informally with the tutor most directly concerned. If the student feels unable to raise their concerns with that tutor, the concerns should be discussed with the student's Year Leader.
- 4.2 Lodging a formal complaint:** if this does not result in a satisfactory solution, the student may make a formal complaint to the Programme Convener, who will provide a written response. (Any complaints of serious misconduct should always be made formally and directly to the Programme Convener).
- 4.3 Pursuing a formal complaint:** if the student is not satisfied by the outcome of the previous stage, s/he may refer the complaint directly to the Director of Higher Education who will meet the student in person, and carefully consider their concerns. A written response will be made to the student, copied to the University.
- 4.4 Final appeal:** if the student has concerns about the conduct of the process set out in steps 1—3 above, s/he may make a final appeal to the University in line with the procedures set out on their website. Dissatisfaction with the outcome of step 3 is not sufficient grounds for appeal.
- 4.5 OIA:** the student can ask the OIA to review the outcome of the College and University's complaints and academic appeals process. The request for review should normally be submitted within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.

## 5. Student appeals: academic

Waverley Abbey College is dedicated to ensuring the University academic regulations are fully and fairly implemented. However, if students wish to appeal against any academic decision made by Waverley Abbey College, the student should follow the procedures set out below:

## 6. Marking of assessments

- 6.1. Informal discussion:** all marks and final awards are provisional until confirmed by the Awards and Progression Board held by the University.
  - 6.1.1. Students may not dispute the academic or professional judgement of markers on an assessment or examination outcome. However, if a student has a concern about an academic decision, for example, if a student is unclear why a

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<sup>5</sup> QAA Code/B9/Ind. 2

particular mark has been awarded for an assessment or examination, the student may request a tutorial with the first marker or their personal tutor in order to gain a greater clarity on the reasons for the academic decision and to be given advice and support on ways of improving future assessment or examination work.

6.1.2. If the student has concerns about an irregularity in the process of awarding a mark (see acceptable grounds for appeal under 'Formal Appeals to Waverley Abbey College' on the following page) the student may write to the Academic Registrar within seven working days of the publication of results to request an investigation. A decision on the concern will be made as speedily as is consistent with the complexity of the issue and the availability of relevant staff to comment.

**6.2. Formal Appeal to Waverley Abbey College:** appeals will not be accepted against the academic or professional judgements of markers on an assessment outcome (where these have been properly exercised in accordance with the University regulations), and nor will claims for mitigation on the grounds of ill-health or distress be allowed where there is no independent, contemporaneous medical evidence.

6.2.1. An appeal must state the ground(s) on which it is presented. The acceptable grounds for an appeal are limited; the only legitimate grounds for appeal shall be one or more of the following:

- that marks have been incorrectly recorded or incorrectly aggregated, or that the procedure for collation of marks has been incorrectly followed
- that there has been an irregularity in the conduct of examinations or other forms of assessment, of such a nature as to cause reasonable doubts as to whether the markers would have reached the same conclusion if the alleged irregularity had not occurred
- that there have been circumstances which affected the candidate's performance which he/she could not or did not, for valid reasons, divulge prior to the assessment or examination
- that the candidate has demonstrable reason to believe that one or more of the markers was prejudiced or unreasonably biased.

**6.3. Appeal:** Appeals must be made in writing to the Programme Convener (or the Director of Higher Education when the Programme Convener is the marker) within 14 days of the published results. A decision on the appeal will be made as speedily as is consistent with the complexity of the issue and the availability of relevant staff to

comment.

- 6.4. **Final Appeal:** If the student believes that the University procedures and guidance have not been followed, s/he may make a direct appeal to the University. That appeal will then be dealt with under the University's procedures.
- 6.5. **OIA:** The student can ask the OIA to review the outcome of the College and University's complaints and academic appeals process. The request for review should normally be submitted within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.

## 7. Extensions for essays or exams (mitigating circumstances)<sup>6</sup>

Waverley Abbey College follows the University procedures and guidance for all such matters. If a student should wish to appeal against any decision by the Waverley Academic Registrar, the process is as follows:

- 7.1 Informal discussion:** the student should in the first instance discuss the matter with the Registrar, who will explain the decision in light of the University's guidance.
- 7.2 Lodging a formal appeal:** if the student believes that the University guidance has not been followed, or is dissatisfied with any decision made within the flexibility allowed by that guidance, s/he should make a formal appeal in writing to the Programme Convener. The Programme Convener will consider the case carefully and respond in writing.
- 7.3 Pursuing a formal appeal:** if the student is still dissatisfied, s/he may appeal in writing to the Director of Higher Education who will meet the student in person, and carefully consider their concerns. A written response will be made to the student, copied to the University, and giving contact details for stage 4, if needed.
- 7.4 Final appeal:** if the student believes that University procedures and guidance have not been followed, s/he may make a direct appeal to the University. That appeal will then be dealt with under University procedures.
- 7.5 OIA:** the student can ask the OIA to review the outcome of the College and University's complaints and academic appeals process. The request for review should normally be submitted within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.

## 8. Appeals by Potential Students<sup>7</sup>

Waverley Abbey College is committed to handling the applications promptly and fairly, and

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<sup>6</sup> QAA Code/B6/Ind. 8

<sup>7</sup> QAA Code/B2/Ind. 4

in line with the policies set out in the Programme Specification. If an applicant is unhappy about the decision reached, s/he may appeal using the following procedures:

- 8.1. **Lodging a formal appeal:** a written appeal should be made to the Waverley Academic Registrar, who will consider the appeal, consulting the interview panel, and then respond in writing to the applicant.
- 8.2. **Pursuing a formal appeal (1):** if the applicant is not satisfied, s/he may raise remaining concerns in writing with the Programme Convener, who will review the Academic Registrar's report and consider any further information provided by the applicant.
- 8.3. **Pursuing a formal appeal (2):** should the applicant still be dissatisfied, s/he may refer the appeal directly to the Director of Higher Education who will meet the applicant in person if they wish, and carefully consider their concerns. A written response will be made to the applicant, copied to the University and including contact details for stage 4.
- 8.4. **Final appeal:** the applicant may make a final appeal to University, if they have concerns about the conduct of the process set out in steps 1—3 above. Dissatisfaction with the outcome of step 3 is not sufficient grounds for appeal.
- 8.5. **OIA:** the OIA does not accept requests for reviews relating to the Admissions process.