

RCA Student Complaints Policy 2023/24

Overview

The RCA is committed to providing you with a high-quality experience during your studies. We also recognise that, on occasion, you may experience dissatisfaction with something we have done or not done, or with the standard of service we provide. The student complaints procedure is available to you where it is not possible to resolve your concern through routine conversation with a member of staff or through feedback processes such as student assemblies.

Circumstances covered by the student complaints procedure include:

- If we have not met obligations outlined in your programme handbook or in policies that support the wider student experience;
- If you have been given misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or other promotional information that we have published;
- Concerns you have about the delivery of your programme, the supporting administration, facilities, learning resources or services;
- Circumstances that have caused significant disruption to your studies;
- The approach we take to student welfare, financial support or our implementation of the UK Government's immigration policy as it applies to Higher Education students;
- Complaints about the conduct of a member of staff
- Services delivered by organisations or individuals contracted by RCA that impact on you.

Any student registered on an RCA course may use the complaints procedure, including up to two months after completing your studies or leaving the College for any other reason. The complaints procedure is designed to be fair, efficient and transparent and comprises three stages:

- Stage 1: Local Informal Resolution – where we aim to resolve the majority of complaints
- Stage 2: Formal Investigation and Resolution – if the outcome of Stage 1 is unsatisfactory
- Stage 3: Review – where the Stage 2 outcome can be reviewed in specific circumstances

NOTE: Most student complaints will be resolved through Local Informal Resolution. For a complaint to move to Stage 2, a clear and visible case will be required.

Equality and Diversity

Your complaint will be considered within the context of the [RCA Equality and Diversity Policy](#). The College's RCA general statement on anti-discrimination can be viewed here: [Full Statement](#)

We will make reasonable adjustments to the application of this policy where you require this.

Dignity and Respect

All students and staff engaging in the complaints process must behave with dignity and respect to each other. The complaints procedure will be halted where unreasonable behaviours occur. The College will use the Student Misconduct and Disciplinary Policy where behaviours constitute misconduct.

Support

If you are unsure about making a complaint or need some advice on how to proceed, the RCA Students' Union will provide you with independent support. If matters relating to your complaint are impacting negatively on your wellbeing or mental health, Student Support is also available to you.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

The College is obliged to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of students in accordance with the UK and College Health and Safety, legislation and policies. There will be situations when the College will be required to adapt and potentially suspend academic and technical delivery in order to fulfil its statutory duty. The College will endeavour to ensure that any disruption is minimised and that any changes will aim to continue to support a positive student experience, as far as practicably possible.

Confidentiality

The College will manage your complaint confidentially. It will be necessary for a limited number of people to know the details of your complaint for it to be addressed. Depending on the stage of the complaints process, this will include staff who manage the complaint, who undertake the investigation, are named in the complaint, are witnesses to the matters it raises, are part of a panel that considers the complaint or who are asked to review a complaint outcome. The College's Senior Leadership Team will be briefed on a complaint that may have significant reputational implications.

Fairness and Transparency

The complaints process is designed to ensure that staff involved in its response are sufficiently independent from the topic that you have raised. You will not be disadvantaged in your studies or in any other way if you submit a complaint. The only exception is if you submit a vexatious complaint. More information about how we define a vexatious complaint and the actions we may take in response are provided in the Student Complaints Procedure.

Anonymous Complaints

You can make an anonymous complaint. However, the College will be unable to investigate anonymous complaints under this procedure as we are unable to complete an appropriately robust investigation. Any anonymous complaints that are submitted will be recorded and may be notified to the Dean or Service Lead.

As noted earlier, you will not be disadvantaged in any way by submitting a complaint and we will manage your complaint confidentially. We strongly encourage you to talk to a member of staff or the Students' Union if, despite these assurances, you have a concern that you do not feel you can raise through the complaint process without doing so anonymously. The Students' Union or a member of staff can discuss this matter, with the Head of Student Experience (or their Deputy) to consider if there are any actions that the College is able to take, for example, in relation to safeguarding. Discussion with the Head of Student Experience (or their Deputy) would only take place with your agreement.

Further information about anonymous reporting is also available at our [Report + Support](#) site. Non-anonymised complaints received through Report + Support will be considered through the complaints process.

Complaints about members of staff

If your complaint is about a member of staff, it will be investigated through the relevant stage/s of the complaints procedure. As with complaints about other matters, you will be informed if all or part of the complaint is upheld or rejected. You will not normally be informed of any staff developmental or disciplinary actions that may follow the complaint outcome.

Group Complaints

We recognise that you may wish to submit a complaint as a group where you identify that more than one student is negatively affected by the same matter in the same way. The way in which we will manage group complaints is set out in the Student Complaints Procedure.

Meetings

Any student or member of staff attending a meeting to discuss a complaint or attend a hearing can be accompanied by another student/Students' Union representative or member of staff respectively.

Reporting on and learning from Student Complaints

The College will compile an annual report of the themes and broad outcomes arising from complaints, and this will be received by the Council in November. This report will also provide an overview of broader actions the College has taken in response to complaints to minimise future cases.

Matters not covered in this policy

There are specific policies relating to complaints on other matters which are:

- Bullying and Harassment (Bullying and Harassment Policy)
- Decisions about admission to an RCA course (Admissions Policy)
- Decisions about your fee status (Fee Status Policy)
- Decisions about your academic results (Academic Appeals Policy)
- Decisions made about the outcome of a student disciplinary hearing (Student Misconduct policy)
- Appeals against the decision of an Assessment Board (Academic Regulations)
- Matters relating to the Students' Union (RCA Students' Union Complaints Policy)

Office for Students

The Office for Students is the regulator for universities and colleges in England and publishes [information](#) for students about the process for making complaints.

RCA Student Complaints Forms

RCA Student Complaints Form (used for stage 1 and 2): <https://forms.gle/8PDCBJ41MknDPmLP6>
RCA Student Complaints - Stage 3 Review Form: <https://forms.gle/EvzfUv5Q4okExPwv5>

RCA Student Complaints Procedure

Preparing your complaint

1. If you plan to submit a complaint, please read the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure.
2. The RCA Students' Union is available to provide you with independent advice on your proposed complaint or about the College complaints process.
3. If you decide to submit a complaint, we ask that you do so normally no longer than 20 working days after the incident to which it relates so that we can engage with you swiftly.
4. We aim to address your complaints in the *working days* timescale set out in the procedure below. If your complaint is particularly complex, we may require further time to respond. We will always let you know if we are unable to meet the published timescale and the reason why.
5. If your complaint contains matters that extend beyond the remit of the complaints procedure, we will assess how we can best manage all matters in the most effective way and will explain our approach to you.
6. As noted in our Student Complaints Policy, you will not be disadvantaged in your studies or in any other way if you submit a complaint.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

7. Stage 1 is the first stage of the complaints procedure and provides the opportunity for your complaint to be addressed informally in the School/Research Office or Professional Service Department to which the matter relates. You should submit your complaint using the [RCA Student Complaints Form](#) that summarises the matter you wish to complain about and the outcome that you are seeking. You are not required to email your complaint to RCA staff members, Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor.

The Complaints Manager will share the stage 1 complaint with the School General Manager or Research Office Administrator (or nominated School/Research Office complaints lead) via the School/Research Office email address or the Professional Service Department lead.

8. If your complaint relates to more than one area of the College (e.g. a School and a Service Department or two Schools), the Complaints Manager receiving your complaint will liaise with staff in the other part of the College on how to best address your concerns.
9. You will receive an acknowledgement email from the School/Research Office or Professional Service Department normally within 3 working days. This email will either:
 - (i) Set out how the matter you raised has been addressed.
 - (ii) State the actions that will be taken to address the matter and by when
 - (iii) Invite you to meet with the School/Research Office or Professional Service Department complaint lead to discuss your complaint

10. If required, a meeting will be scheduled normally within 7 working days of you submitting your complaint and will be held face-to-face or on-line. If your complaint involves more than one part of the College, staff from that other area will be invited to the meeting. We will let you know who will attend the meeting.
11. At the meeting you and the School/Research Office or Professional Service Department complaint lead will discuss the nature of your complaint, the outcome you are seeking, the actions that the College is able to take in response and by when these can be achieved. If the College is unable to meet the outcomes you are seeking, you will be provided with the reasons why.
12. The School/Research Office or Professional Service Department complaint lead will take notes of the meeting and these will be shared with you by email normally within 3 working days. If you think there are any factual errors in the notes that you receive, you will have the opportunity to respond.
13. Each School/Research Office or Professional Service Department will keep a confidential record of Stage 1 complaints, including notes from meetings, so that it can monitor the number and nature of complaints that have been raised and the action taken. A record of your complaint will not be held on your student file.
14. We always aim to meet the timescales set out for Stage 1. Should this not be possible, we will let you know the revised timescale and the reason why. Where you are unable to submit information within the timescale we suggest, we would also ask you to provide us with the reasons why.

Stage 2: Formal Investigation and Resolution

15. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal Stage 1, you may choose to request formal investigation and resolution by completing the [RCA Student Complaints Form](#) again.
16. You should normally submit your stage 2 complaint within 21 working days of receiving the Stage 1 outcome so that the College can respond to your complaint as swiftly as possible. The Form will guide you through the additional information required to accompany your complaint.
17. The Complaints Manager will acknowledge your complaint by email normally within 3 working days.
18. Normally, within 14 working days of submitting your complaint, you will receive a further email to state that the College will either:
 - (i) Confirm that your complaint will be formally investigated
 - (ii) Ask you for clarification about an aspect/s of your submission and why
 - (iii) Reject your grounds for complaint and provide the reason/s why
19. If you are asked for clarification, you will be provided with a timescale in which this should ideally be completed. Once you have provided clarification, the Complaints Manager will provide confirmation normally within 5 working days as to whether your complaint will be investigated or rejected.

20. If your complaint will be investigated, the Complaints Manager will lead the investigation or appoint an internal investigator. The investigator will be from a different part of the College to which your complaint relates and different to the staff involved in Stage 1. On occasion, it may be necessary for the College to appoint an external investigator should additional or specialist capacity be required.
21. The investigator will:
- (i) Review your complaint and any supporting documentation;
 - (ii) Inform the member/s of staff responsible for the activity about which you have made a complaint that your complaint has been received and provide them with the opportunity to respond;
 - (iii) Decide if they need to hold one-to-one meetings with either you, the member/s of staff or any witnesses should this be helpful to their investigation.
 - (iv) Write a report that summarises the nature of the complaint, confirms the actions that have been taken within the investigation, sets out the findings and the decision.
 - (v) Normally complete the investigation within 21 working days of the decision for it to proceed.
22. The outcome of the investigation will be to either:
- (i) Uphold all or part of your complaint and confirm the actions that will be taken (the Chief Operating Officer must first approve the actions if legal, financial or reputational to the College);
 - (ii) Reject the complaint and set out the reasons why;
 - (iii) Exceptionally, establish a College Complaints Panel because the complexity of the case means that it is not possible for the investigator to form a conclusion.
23. You will receive a copy of the investigation report and the decision by email, as will the School/Research Office or Professional Service Department.
24. In the exceptional case that a College Complaints Panel is formed, this will take place normally within 21 working days of the provisional outcome being provided to you. The Panel will comprise of at least one Senior Academic (Assistant Dean or Dean) who will Chair, and one Senior Professional Service staff member (SM1 and above) who have not been involved in the case to date and normally the President or Vice-President or a nominated and trained student representative appointed by the Students' Union. A panel will still proceed if the Students' Union choose to not take part. All staff and Students on panels are required to have completed the College's Unconscious Bias and Race Equity training.
25. The Complaints Manager will organise the panel and the administrative support to minute the panel meeting.
26. The Complaints Manager will provide the Panel with a copy of your complaint and the report from the investigator. They will ask to meet with you, the member/s of staff responsible for the activity about which you have made a complaint and any relevant witnesses. The meeting will take place in-person or on-line.
27. You will be provided with the outcome of the Panel normally within 3 working days of its meeting. The Panel will make a decision to either:

- (i) Uphold all or part of your complaint and confirm the actions that will be taken (the Chief Operating Officer must first approve the actions if legal, financial or reputational to the College);
- (ii) Reject the complaint and set out the reasons why;

28. The minutes of the panel will normally be shared within 10 working days of the panel with all parties. All parties will have 5 working days to provide any comments or clarifications of accuracy to the Complaints Manager.

29. We will always aim to meet the timescales set out in the Stage 2 procedure. Should this not be possible, we will let you know the revised timescale and the reason why. Where a case is complex, it can sometimes be necessary to extend the investigation period to ensure that all the facts can be obtained. Again, we will always provide you with updates should a timescale need to be changed. Where you are unable to submit information within the timescale we suggest, we would also ask you to provide us with the reasons why.

Stage 3: Review of the Stage 2 outcome

30. You may request a review of Stage 2 on the grounds that either:

- (i) Stage 2 procedures have not been conducted correctly;
- (ii) The outcome from Stage 2 is unreasonable;
- (iii) You have new evidence that could make a difference to the outcome which could not have reasonably been provided during the Stage 2 process.

31. You should submit a [Stage 3 Review Form](#) normally within 14 working days from the outcome of Stage 2 so that the College can act as swiftly as possible. The Form will guide you through the information you need to provide.

32. Your Form will be received and reviewed by the Registrar who will normally provide email acknowledgement within 3 working days.

33. Normally within 14 working days of submitting your complaint, you will receive an email to confirm the outcome of the review. It will confirm that either:

- (i) No further action will be taken. This decision will be made where there is evidence to show that the Stage 2 investigation process was carried out correctly and/or that the outcome is reasonable and/or that the new evidence would not make any difference to the outcome.
- (ii) There will be a revised outcome approved by the Chief Operating Officer. This will take place where there is evidence to show that there were shortcomings in the Stage 2 investigation process and/or that the outcome was not reasonable and/or that the new evidence you submitted was relevant to your case.

This Stage 3 decision will be the final part of the College's role in the complaint procedure and we will close your complaint and issue a Closure of Procedures Letter. Please see the section below on 'closing your complaint' for more information.

Group Complaints

34. The complaints procedure applies equally to complaints submitted by you as an individual or where you are part of a group. Where you or one of your fellow students plans to submit a group complaint, the group will need to nominate one or two lead representatives.
35. Where you progress a group complaint to Stage 2, we require only one complaint form to be submitted. We will contact each student named as a signatory (including student number) to the complaint to confirm that you wish to progress the complaints process as part of the Group.
36. The Group will need to agree to the text that forms the basis of the complaint and the supporting evidence before it is submitted.
37. If we identify during a complaint investigation that members of the group complaint have been affected negatively by the same matter but in different ways, we will split consideration of the complaint into sub-groups or assess cases individually to ensure fairness.
38. Where the College receives multiple complaints from individual students about the same issue, we will consider the benefits of considering the matter as a group complaint. However, if you have submitted an individual complaint, and do not wish for your case to be considered as part of a proposed group or sub-group, you retain the right for your case to be considered individually.

Vexatious complaints

39. The College will not tolerate complaints that are vexatious. Examples of vexatious complaints include where:
 - There is no basis to the complaint
 - Its main reason is to cause distress, disruption or harassment
 - The matter is trivial or frivolous
 - You are aware that the matter is already being dealt with
 - You persist with a complaint that has been closed
 - You make excessive or repeated demands (e.g. every few days)
 - Behaviour and language is unacceptable and/or abusive
 - You request unrealistic outcomes
40. The College also reserves the right to take disciplinary or legal action against anyone making vexatious or frivolous complaints. The College will not respond to frivolous complaints.

Closing the complaint

41. Your complaint is closed when no further action will be taken by the College to consider your complaint. At this stage, the College will provide you with a Completion of Procedures letter. This letter will provide you with information about how you may then contact the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#) (OIA) if you are dissatisfied about how the College has managed your complaint. The OIA is an independent body set up to review student complaints about Higher Education providers in England and Wales and is a service that is free to students.