

Document Title/Reference	Complaints (Non-Assessment Related) Policy and Procedures
<p>Purpose</p>	<p>To provide clear, effective and student-centred policy & procedures to handle non-assessment related complaints, both formal and informal, without the need for acrimonious disagreement, protracted disputes or litigation.</p> <p>To ensure that teaching and support staff are fully guided during complaint handling procedures.</p> <p>To minimise the number of formal complaints for the mutual benefit of students and staff through active management of the informal stages.</p>
<p>Scope</p>	<p>Non-assessment related student complaints – student services, teaching, etc.</p>
<p>Contents</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Policy Statement 2 Principles Governing the Complaints Procedure 3 Scope of the Procedure 4 Summary and Definition of the Procedures 5 Student Complaints Procedure <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Stage 1: Informal Complaint 5.2 Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint 5.3 Stage 3: Appeal
<p>Contextual Guidelines</p>	<p>ESG 1.3 ‘Student Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment (institution ‘has appropriate procedures for dealing with student complaints’).</p>
<p>Related IPA Policy</p>	<p><i>Policy and Procedures for Student Feedback & Participation</i> <i>Procedures for Appeal of Examination Results</i></p>
<p>Audience & Communication</p>	<p>Applicable to all students, staff, and the Education Committee.</p> <p>The Institute will be open, transparent and inclusive and will communicate its policy & procedures on complaints in programme documentation (Moodle) and on its website, and through direct contact made between members of the learning community.</p>

<p>Policy Owner & Implementation</p>	<p>The Head of the Whitaker School has responsibility for policy oversight. The policy is approved by IPA Faculty.</p> <p>The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of all members of the community: students, administrative staff, lecturers, programme co-ordinators, assistant registrar, and Head of the Whitaker School.</p>
<p>Key Implementation Actions</p>	<p>Complaints Policy & Procedures are provided to staff and to students in their programme guides, on Moodle and IPA website.</p> <p>Stated procedures establish timelines and responsibilities to ensure that the complaints system functions effectively.</p> <p>Procedures involve completion of pro-forma documentation to record the nature and outcome of each formal complaint.</p>
<p>Monitoring, Evaluation & Continuous Improvement</p>	<p>The efficacy of this policy will be determined annually by the assistant registrar based on the number and nature of complaints received during the year, the number of satisfactory resolutions achieved, the number of complaints resolved within the stated timeframe.</p> <p>The informal complaints resolution process is by its nature a continuous process and will be improved through student engagement and the learning experience of Institute staff.</p> <p>The formal procedure will develop as a result of the collection of information and timely response to and resolution of student concerns and complaints. Formal complaints will feed into the process of improving education provision and the Complaints (Non-Assessment Related) Policy & Procedure itself.</p> <p>A complete review will be undertaken every 3 years under the direction of the Head of the Whitaker School.</p>
<p>Revision History & Commencement Date & Date of Next Review</p>	<p>2006: Version 1 2010: Version 2 2016: Version 3</p> <p>Commencement Date (2016 Version): May 2017</p> <p>Date of Next Review: 2020</p>

Complaints (Non-Assessment Related) Policy and Procedures

1 Policy Statement

The Institute of Public Administration values the opportunity to contribute to the personal and professional development of its students, who are drawn from public and private sector organisations. The academic experience of these professional learners is essential to the successful maintenance and development of the Institute's role as the country's leading public sector development agency. That is why the Institute is committed to high standards of service delivery, whether in teaching, research, administration or student support.

An important element in maintaining high standards is student feedback, both informally and formally, in surveys and focus groups. Student participation is also essential to address potential problems before they ever get to the level of a complaint. The IPA has dedicated procedures to support feedback mechanisms in *Student Feedback & Participation: Policy and Procedures*.

Notwithstanding the above, the IPA recognises that issues/problems can arise even with the best designed student centred system, and that these problems can give rise to complaints. The Institute considers complaints as an important part of developing better understanding, better policies and procedures and, overall, an opportunity to enhance quality assurance. Complaints are recognised as providing important learning opportunities to improve community interaction, and as a valuable means of demonstrating the professional and committed nature of the Institute and its staff to students. Not all complaints can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties; resources, timescales and a host of other factors can mitigate against resolution of a particular issue. The Institute is committed, however, to a complaints procedure that, in addition to being transparent and methodical, approaches the resolution of complaints in the collegiate and reasonable spirit that higher education institutions should embody.

Accordingly, the IPA has in place stated procedures to handle complaints without the need for acrimonious disagreement, protracted disputes or litigation, and students are invited to bring any dissatisfaction with the Institute's services or teaching to the attention of staff members (dissatisfaction with assessment is handled under *Procedures for Appeal of Examination Results*). This policy is focused on ensuring that the interests of both students and staff are safeguarded by providing clear, timely, fair, simple and confidential procedures for the resolution of legitimate complaints.

2 Principles Governing the Complaints Procedure

- 2.1 The Institute accepts that it must meet an academic standard and level of support that (a) befits a recognised college of University College Dublin and (b) is appropriately geared towards the profile of its students – professionals who study part-time through evening lectures or by distance education.
- 2.2 The Institute encourages students who are dissatisfied with the academic or support service to make contact with the person(s) responsible in order to resolve issues. These contacts are welcomed as they help ensure that IPA programme delivery is student-centred.
- 2.3 The following procedures involve ways to settle as many disputes as possible in an informal manner in the interests of good management and cordial relations between students and staff.
- 2.4 The Institute accepts that in some cases informal contacts may not offer an effective response or may be inappropriate. In such cases, a formal process for lodging a complaint is available to students.
- 2.5 The complaints procedure is designed to be transparent, with both student and Institute following an agreed process. The scope and nature of the procedure, therefore, will be available to students and staff.
- 2.6 The complaints procedure will be fair, consistent and trusted; it will not affect any student's or employee's rights in law.
- 2.7 Complaints will be investigated promptly and thoroughly, but with due regard to the need for confidentiality, sensitivity and comprehensiveness.
- 2.8 The procedure will address all the points at issue, and provide an effective response and appropriate redress.
- 2.9 There will be provision for an appeal, with external involvement, if the complainant remains dissatisfied.
- 2.10 Complaints made anonymously will not be accepted as legitimate complaints.
- 2.11 Students who identify themselves, however, can be assured that the investigation of their complaint will remain confidential as far as practicable.
- 2.12 Only students who have registered for the year have the right to have their complaint handled.
- 2.13 A student has the right to be accompanied and represented by any individual of his or her choice at any stage in the procedure. If the complaint concerns an individual member of staff, that member of staff has the right to be supplied with a copy of the complaint and also has the right to be accompanied and represented by an individual of his or her choice in any investigation.

3 Scope of the Procedure

3.1 The procedure covers dissatisfaction with:

- i) programme content;
- ii) content delivery and tuition, including dissertation supervision;
- iii) academic support;
- iv) conduct of examinations, unless the student has a related dispute with their exam results, in which case 3.3 applies;
- v) academic events such as weekend seminars etc.
- vi) administrative services

3.2 The procedure covers complaints relating to harassment or discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital or civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, membership of the Travelling Community or race including colour, nationality, or ethnicity.

3.3 Complaints about assessment results are covered by procedures in the section *Procedures for Appeal of Examination Results*.

4 Summary and Definition of the Procedures

There are three stages in the complaints procedure, as follows: (a) Informal Stage, (b) Formal Written Complaint and (c) Appeal.

- (a) Informal Stage: This is an attempt to resolve the problem as close to the source as possible with a lecturer or administrator or, if necessary, their line-manager. This complaint can be made in person, by phone or through written communication.
- (b) Formal Written Complaint: A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal stage or who does not feel it is appropriate to make an informal complaint can make a formal written complaint by completing a complaint form.
- (c) Appeal: A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal written complaint can appeal the outcome by completing a student complaint appeal form.

5 Student Complaints Procedure

5.1 Stage 1: Informal Complaint

5.1.1 Student approach

5.1.1.1 In the interests of efficiency and good management, students are encouraged to approach the staff member who is closest to the disputed matter. Because of the

Institute's structure, the person closest to the matter does not necessarily have to be a lecturer, associate lecturer or member of the administrative staff. It can be the Head of the Whitaker School, assistant registrar, module co-ordinator, programme co-ordinator or administration manager.

5.1.1.2 This informal approach may be made in person, by phone or through written communication.

5.1.2 Procedures for investigating an informal complaint

5.1.2.1 A member of staff who receives an informal complaint should undertake any investigation required and then respond to the student.

5.1.2.2 If an associate lecturer or member of the administrative staff receives a complaint they may, if they feel appropriate, pass the complaint to either the Head of the Whitaker School, module co-ordinator, programme co-ordinator or administration manager.

5.1.2.3 The response would normally be made in the same medium as that used by the complainant. The response should give the student an indication of the outcome, providing explanations for the perceived problem or, if the complaint is substantiated, the actions taken to remedy the problem. In some, relatively rare, cases, it may not be possible to rectify the matter to the benefit of the specific student that has complained. Notwithstanding that response, students may proceed to submit a formal complaint.

5.1.2.4 Students may by-pass the informal approach and proceed with a formal written complaint as outlined in stage 5.2 of the procedure.

5.2 Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint

5.2.1 Student approach

5.2.1.1 A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint, or who does not wish a complaint to be handled in an informal way, may proceed with a formal written complaint.

5.2.1.2 The student must complete a Formal Complaint form (attached as Appendix) and submit it to the Head of the Whitaker School. This must normally be done within 2 weeks of the outcome of the first, informal stage (where this has been carried out), and normally not later than 4 weeks after first becoming aware of the incident or issues

giving rise to the complaint (a period greater than 4 weeks may be allowed at the absolute discretion of the Head of the Whitaker School).

5.2.1.3 The Head of the Whitaker School will acknowledge receipt of the form (normally within 5 working days).

5.2.1.4 Complaints against the Head of the Whitaker School should be addressed to the Director General, and to the IPA Board if against the Director General.

5.2.1.5 If the complaint relates to an individual member of staff, he or she must be provided with a copy at the earliest possible opportunity.

5.2.2 Procedures for investigating a formal written complaint

5.2.2.1 If no attempt was made to resolve matters at a local level, it may be appropriate for the Head of the Whitaker School to refer the complaint back to the assistant registrar, programme co-ordinator or administration manager.

5.2.2.2 All parties involved – including witnesses – should be informed that a complaint has been lodged and will be investigated.

5.2.2.3 Every complainant should have the opportunity to speak to the Head of the Whitaker School. During these meetings, a member of staff will also be present to take notes. The notes should be copied to the complainant, and should be retained for the record.

5.2.2.4 If the various parties involved in a dispute are interviewed separately, any fresh allegations made during an interview should be made known to anyone who was not present at the interview.

5.2.2.5 The Head of the Whitaker School should respond in writing to the student within 3 weeks of the student's submission of the complaint. This response should indicate what action has been taken or is proposed to resolve the complaint, or the reasons for not upholding the complaint.

5.3 Stage 3: Appeal

5.3.1 Student approach

5.3.1.1 A student who is still dissatisfied after the second stage has the right of appeal.

5.3.1.2 Appeals must be made on the Student Complaint Appeal Form (see Appendix) to the Director General within 2 weeks of the student's receiving notification of the outcome of the stage 2 investigation described above.

5.3.2 Procedures for reviewing an appeal

- 5.3.2.1 The Director General will acknowledge receipt of the appeal form within 5 working days and convene a Complaints Review Panel.
- 5.3.2.2 The Panel will consist of the 1) Director General, 2) Chairman of the Education Committee or his nominee and 3) one other member of the Education Committee. As the Education Committee meets 3 times a year, it may not be possible to nominate a member for the Review Panel. In such cases, the third member will be proposed by the Chairman.
- 5.3.2.3 None of the panel members should have had any previous involvement in the case.
- 5.3.2.4 The panel will normally meet within 5 weeks of receipt of the appeal letter.
- 5.3.2.5 All parties involved will be notified of the date, time and place of the hearing not less than 2 weeks in advance of the meeting. Such notification will normally be in writing, but if this is not practicable, then by other means.
- 5.3.2.6 The complainant, and anyone implicated in the complaint, has the right to appear before the Panel, accompanied by an individual of his or her choice.
- 5.3.2.7 The Panel may interview or seek written evidence from any other person who in the Panel's judgement may have relevant information to contribute.
- 5.3.2.8 The Panel will receive copies of the Formal Complaint Forms and the Student Complaints Appeal Form and any correspondence entered into with the student and any other documentation relevant to the complaint. If any of the parties concerned wishes additional documentation to be considered, he or she must submit it to the Director General not less than five days in advance of the Panel meeting.
- 5.3.2.9 All parties have the right to see all documentation to be considered by the Panel.
- 5.3.2.10 The Panel will communicate its findings and recommendations to the complainant within 10 working days of the Panel's meeting.
- 5.3.2.11 The Panel will send reports to the Head of the Whitaker School, summarising the complaint, the actions taken to resolve it and the Panel's conclusions and recommendations.
- 5.3.2.12 When a complaint is upheld, the panel will ask the Head of the Whitaker School to respond within 3 weeks of receiving the report, indicating the action taken or proposed (including redress, where appropriate) in the light of the Panel's recommendations.

STUDENT COMPLAINT FORM

Students must be familiar with the Student Complaints Procedure before completing the form. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, consistent with a full investigation of the complaint.

N.B. Complaints made anonymously will not be accepted.

1. Name of Complainant: (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Course:

Student Number:

2. Address for correspondence (with postcode):

Telephone

3. Details of Complaint *:

* Please ensure that all relevant details are provided, including, where relevant, the date, time and place of the incident giving rise to the complaint. You may use an additional sheet if necessary.

4. Summary of informal action taken to resolve the complaint:

I declare that to the best of my knowledge, this form contains a complete and accurate account of all the factors relevant to my complaint. I understand that a copy of this form may be provided to a member of staff who is the subject of the complaint, or who is otherwise involved, and that making a complaint which is found to be mischievous or malicious may be deemed to be a breach of the IPA Student Rules of Discipline.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

The completed form should be addressed to the Head of the Whitaker School.

STUDENT COMPLAINTS APPEAL FORM

Students must be familiar with the Student Complaints Procedure before completing the form. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, consistent with a full investigation of the complaint.

1. Name: (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Course:

Student Number:

2. Address for correspondence (with postcode):

Telephone

3. Details of Appeal*:

* Please ensure that all relevant details are provided, including the circumstances that gave rise to the initial complaint. You may use an additional sheet if necessary.

4. Summary of informal action and formal action taken to resolve the issue:

I declare that to the best of my knowledge, this form contains a complete and accurate account of all the factors relevant to my appeal. I understand that a copy of this form may be provided to a member of staff who party to the complaint.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

The completed form should be addressed to the Director General.