

<b>Royal Northern College of Music</b>
<b>Student Complaints</b>
<b>Policy &amp; Procedure</b>
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**RNCM**  
ROYAL NORTHERN  
COLLEGE of MUSIC

## 1. **Introduction**

The College is committed to ensuring that we provide for you, our students the highest quality learning experience, supported by appropriate academic, administrative and student support services and facilities. We offer an environment where academic, personal and professional standards are strictly upheld and where the rights, wellbeing, dignity and merits of every individual student is respected. We recognise, however, that there may be occasions when you will feel that you have cause for complaint.

Our Student Charter sets out our responsibilities to you and yours to us. If you believe you have a legitimate issue of concern, you should refer in the first instance to the Student Charter to clarify what it is reasonable for you to expect from the College in the relevant area and whether we have discharged our corresponding obligations and responsibilities. If, having consulted the Student Charter, you still wish to raise your concern you should follow the procedures set out in this Policy.

## 2. **Purpose of the Policy**

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- a) Describe the procedures you should use to raise issues of concern about your programme, facilities and/or services provided by the College or about actions, lack of actions or omissions by the College or its staff.
- b) Provide you with a formal procedure to follow where it has not been possible to resolve a concern to your satisfaction through informal discussions.
- c) Provide you with the opportunity for a more serious concern to be considered directly under Stage 2 of this procedure.

## 3. **Definition of a Student Complaint**

A complaint is a means of registering dissatisfaction with us about the delivery of any of our various services. Examples of the types of complaint covered by this Policy include the following:

- a failing in a College service, academic or non-academic;
- misinformation about academic programmes;
- poor teaching or supervision;
- insufficient facilities;
- the behaviour of a member or members of staff;
- the behaviour of another student or a group of students.

The following matters are not covered by this Policy:

- Appeals against formal assessments undertaken as part of your programme. Such appeals should be pursued under the separate academic appeals procedure described in the Academic Appeals Policy.
- Appeals against decisions taken by the Board of Examiners that your programme should be terminated due to unsatisfactory progress.
- Bullying and harassment – please refer to the Bullying and Harassment

Policy.

A complaint should also be distinguished from negative feedback. We welcome your views, both positive and negative at any time – your feedback is useful to the department, school or service when reviewing its policies and operations and can be given without invoking the complaints procedure.

#### **4. Scope of Policy**

You may make a complaint individually or collectively as group of students. For the purpose of this policy a 'student' is defined as a person who has been accepted to study at the College, a student registered for an award of the College, or a former student who has left the institution within the last two calendar months (who has completed their studies, whose programme has been terminated, has chosen to withdraw from their programme or is deemed to have withdrawn from the programme). In the case of collective complaints one student is required to identify themselves as the main contact for the purposes of communications.

Students who are registered on an award conferred by the College but who are studying on a programme delivered by a partner organisation (e.g. a collaborative programme) should follow the complaints procedure of the partner organisation.

#### **5. General Principles in Dealing with Student Complaints**

We seek to minimise student complaints by ensuring you have opportunities to participate in all the formal decision-making processes of the College through representation on committees. We are committed to the continuing review and enhancement of our provision and welcome regular feedback from you. We are committed to providing an open and inclusive environment within which you are encouraged and feel able to raise any matters of concern in an informal manner as soon as they arise. This often removes the need for formal complaints.

You are encouraged to raise a concern or complaint as soon as possible, and in any case within eight weeks of the event(s) or action(s) (or lack of action(s)) which have prompted the complaint to enable the matter to be addressed in a timely manner. We will not normally consider complaints made after this period, unless there is good reason for the delay.

#### **6. Rights, entitlements and responsibilities under this Policy**

In line with our Student Charter, we acknowledge your rights with respect to raising a complaint, taking into account the expectations below how you should interact with our Complaints Procedure as follows:

- a) You will be treated fairly and consistently under this Policy.
- b) You will not suffer any disadvantage or recrimination as a result of making a complaint in good faith.
- c) We recognise that making complaint can be stressful for all those involved. You will therefore be advised to seek advice and guidance for making a complaint from, for example, the Students' Union or the Student Wellbeing Advisor.
- d) You cannot submit a complaint anonymously.
- e) You are expected not to make any complaint frivolously, vexatiously or with malice. Where a complaint is considered to be named frivolously, vexatiously

or with malice, disciplinary action may be taken against you in accordance with our Student Conduct and Discipline Policy.

- f) You are expected to submit complaints under this Procedure within the timescales indicated. However, we may exercise discretion to extend the timescale where there is good reason, supported by evidence, where you have not been able to submit a complaint within the timescale.
- g) You can expect to receive responses to complaints within the timescale indicated within the Procedure. If we cannot meet as timescale we will inform you in writing, giving you a revised timescale.
- h) You are expected to provide, at that time of submission of your complaint, all relevant documentation or any other evidence and details of all the issues you wish to be taken into consideration.
- i) You can expect complaints to be dealt with confidentially and your privacy respected. However it may be necessary to disclose information to others in order to effectively deal with the complaint.
- j) If it is suspected that the matter of the complaint is a criminal offence you are strongly advised to report the matter to the Police. Where criminal proceedings are underway we may delay the progression of the complaint until the outcome of any proceedings are known.
- k) Where a complaint is found to be justified, we will take necessary action or provide a remedy as is appropriate and do so promptly.
- l) Where a complaint is found not to be justified, you may expect to be informed in writing of the reasons for that decision and be informed of any further rights to request a review the decision.

Any enquiries concerning the Procedure under this Policy should be addressed to the Head of the Registry or nominee in the first instance. If the Head of the Registry is the subject of the complaint any enquiries should be addressed to the Director of Academic Quality.

## **7. Dealing with Complaints**

We expect to resolve all complaints (informal and formal) as swiftly as is feasible. However, complaints are likely to take longer to resolve if they involve complex issues or a number of people, but will not normally take longer than four months to resolve. The person dealing with your complaint should give you an indication of the likely timescale within which a resolution will be achieved. Where the complaint is being dealt with through the formal complaints procedure, the Head of Registry will indicate the timescale they expect to be followed in relation to the complaint and will keep you informed of any changes to that timescale. If you object to the timescale set by the Head of Registry you should indicate the reasons in writing to the Head of Registry, who will in turn notify you as soon as possible of the decision in relation to the objection.

We aim to resolve complaints by following the procedures outlined below, although these may be adapted if necessary to enable the fair and efficient resolution of a particular complaint. If it is deemed by the Head of Registry that a complaint falls under the definition of an academic appeal you will be advised to follow our Academic Appeals Policy. We aim to resolve complaints with a minimum of formality but in a way which is reasonable and transparent in all circumstances. A complaint will be considered to have been resolved when you accept any response and/or

redress offered by us in respect of the complaint and decides not to pursue the complaint further.

## **8. Procedure**

We have a three stage complaints process as follows. Throughout, if the Head of Registry is the subject of the complaint, the complaint will be dealt with by the Director of Academic Quality.

### **Stage 1 - Informal Resolution of a Complaint**

The majority of issues relating to a service, department or school can be resolved satisfactorily within the area in which you have a concern. Wherever possible, complaints should be dealt with and settled at an early stage by discussing the matter informally at the earliest opportunity. You should therefore bring the matter to the attention of an appropriate member of staff, for example, if the complaint concerns academic matters, you might wish to take this up with your Course Leader, the Head of Undergraduate Programmes, Head of the Graduate School or with another member of academic staff or if the matter relates to your principal study – your Head of School or the Deputy Principal (Performance and Programmes). If the complaint is about a College service or department, then you should talk to an appropriate member of staff from the service, department or the Head of Registry. If there is any doubt regarding who to contact you should contact the Head of Registry for advice.

If you make an informal complaint to a member of staff they are responsible for addressing them promptly and fairly. The member of staff you have spoken to will normally let you know within five working days of receiving the initial complaint what steps (if any) will be taken to address the complaint and the expected timescale, and advise you to whom you should submit a formal complaint if you are not satisfied with this outcome.

If the member of staff with whom you have raised the issue does not consider any action is required, they must state their reasons for doing so.

Only when an attempt at informal resolution has failed should the Stage 2 procedure outlined below be followed. A formal complaint will not normally be considered until the informal procedure has been used, unless the matter is particularly serious or complex.

### **Stage 2 - Formal Complaints Procedure**

Where a complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction through the informal process, you should invoke the formal complaints procedure by submitting a written complaint in the form of a completed Student Complaints Form to the Head of Registry within 10 working days of receiving the outcome of your informal complaint. At any stage after the formal process has commenced you may choose to return to the informal procedure to resolve the matter.

The Head of Registry should acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days.

You must make clear in your written submission the relevant facts and matters which it is considered give cause for complaint, together with any relevant documentation, and should clearly state the resolution you are seeking. You should keep a copy of

your complaint and any other documents submitted for your records.

If it appears to the Head of Registry that a complaint is vexatious and/or frivolous, they will discuss it with the Director of Finance and Strategic Planning and together will determine whether it should be rejected on the basis that it is vexatious and/or frivolous. Should a complaint be rejected on this basis no further action will be taken in respect of the complaint, and the Head of Registry will write to you to explain why the complaint has been rejected, also indicating whether any disciplinary action against you is being contemplated.

The complaint will be investigated by the Head of Registry who will arrange to meet you to discuss your complaint in detail. Prior to this meeting, the Head of Registry will seek further information as required from those involved in the complaint as noted on the Student Complaints Form. Where the complaint involves a member of academic staff, the Head of Registry may meet with the Head of School, Head of the Undergraduate Programmes, Deputy Principal (Performance and Programmes) or Director of Research as appropriate.

At the meeting between the Head of Registry and yourself, you may be accompanied by a person of your choice (student, representative of the Students' Union or member of staff not involved in the matter), who may participate with your permission. Other parties to the complaint may also be invited to attend the meeting at the discretion of the person investigating the complaint. A member of Registry staff will be attendance to minute the meeting.

The meeting will follow the format below:

- You will be asked to explain your complaint and present any supporting evidence, following which you may be asked questions by the Head of Registry and by any other parties to the complaint present;
- If present, other parties to the complaint will then respond to the complaint, following which they may be asked questions by the Head of Registry and you (complainant).

If a face-to-face meeting is not possible, alternative arrangements will be made, which may include a virtual meeting.

You will receive a full written response to your complaint, which should detail the nature of the complaint, the findings of any investigation and the points covered in the meeting. The Head of Registry will write to you within 20 working days of initiation of the formal complaints procedure with the outcome of the process, setting out what, if any, redress is offered to you in respect of the complaint, and explaining either why any redress offered is considered to be appropriate, or why no redress has been offered. If this is not possible, you will be informed in writing of the progress being made towards the consideration of their complaint and given a timescale for completion.

We will not normally reimburse expenses incurred by you in the event of a complaint being upheld.

### **Stage 3 - Review by Director of the Finance and Strategic Planning**

If the Head of Registry's decision is not accepted by you under Stage 2, you may apply to the Director of Finance and Strategic Planning to request a review of the outcome of the complaint and/or propose an alternative redress to any offered by the

Head of Registry. Such a request must be in writing within 10 working days of receiving the outcome of receiving the outcome from the Head of Registry. The request should state the grounds for requested review, which must meet one of the following criteria:

- that there were procedural irregularities in the investigation of the complaint; or
- that fresh evidence can be presented which was not or could not reasonably have been made available at the time of the investigation; or
- that the finding of the investigation was inappropriate in light of the evidence.

If the Director of Finance and Strategic Planning is satisfied that a review is justified they will receive for review copies of all documentation relating to the complaint held by the Head of Registry, including your original written submission of the complaint and minutes of the meeting with you. The Director of Finance and Strategic Planning may, in addition, request meetings with you and/or the student/other parties involved in the matters giving rise to the complaint, and request further documentation from us or you.

You will be given at least five working days' notice of a meeting, and may be accompanied by a fellow student, a Students' Union officer or a member of staff. The Director of Finance and Strategic Planning will make a decision regarding the outcome of the Stage 3 review, which may confirm any redress previously offered by the Head of Registry or offer alternative resolution. The decision of the Director of Finance and Strategic Planning is the final internal stage in our complaints procedure.

## **9. Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)**

The RNCM subscribes to the independent scheme for the review of student complaints.

Once you have completed our internal 'Student Complaints' procedure we will issue you with a 'Completion of Procedures' letter.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome you may be able to apply for a review of your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provided that the complaint you take to the OIA is eligible under its Rules.

The OIA's Complaint application form is available from the OIA's website [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).

Should you decide to make a complaint to the OIA, your OIA Complaint Form **must be received by the OIA** within **12 months** of the date of the Completion of Procedure letter provided by the College.

You may also wish to seek advice from the Students' Union about taking your complaint to the OIA.

**Please note that the OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with through the provider's internal procedures, which is evidenced by the Completion of Procedures letter.**

The OIA *will* consider complaints connected with welfare issues, contractual issues, a breach of procedure, discrimination or poor practice.

The OIA *will not* consider complaints connected with academic judgement, admission to the College, matters which are the subject of court or tribunal proceedings or employment matters.

We will comply with any recommendations of the OIA.

**6. Recording and monitoring of complaints**

The Head of Registry will keep a record of all formal student complaints received, the outcomes of these complaints and a record of the action(s) taken when a complaint has been upheld.

The Head of Registry will prepare an annual report on the formal complaints raised, for consideration by the Education and Quality Committee and the Academic Board, or the Executive Committee in the case on non-academic related complaints, so that experiences can be shared and where appropriate changes to procedures / practice made. The report will include demographic data on students raising complaints to enable equalities monitoring to take place.

The effectiveness of these procedures will be reviewed and if necessary updated on a regular basis.



**Student complaints flowchart – full details on Moodle**

