



Communication and Complaint Policy

This policy is addressed to the Senior Management Team; to all tutors and staff, and on request, to parents. A copy can be downloaded from the College website (www.oxcoll.com).

The policy has been approved by the Designated Proprietor of Oxford International College. It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain procedures can only be carried out during term time.

Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Academic Principal expels a student or asks a student to leave and that student's parents seek a review of that decision. A concern about the safety of a student should be notified immediately to the Designated Child Protection Officer (who is currently Kim Terrar). Concerns and complaints directly from students are dealt with under a separate procedure 'Student Complaint Procedure', a copy of which can be supplied upon request.

The term 'parents' refers to the parents of a current or prospective student, the legal or educational guardian of a current or prospective student, and at the College's discretion may also include the parent or legal or educational guardian of a student who has recently left the College.

1. Policy Aim and Statement

POLICY AIM:

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level; and that the concern or complaint is resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice: it is fair to those concerned; and it helps to promote tutors', staff, parents' and students' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances.

POLICY STATEMENT:

We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which could be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. Tutors, staff, parents, and students should never feel—or be made to feel—that a complaint will be taken amiss or adversely affect a student or his/her opportunities at this College. This policy however distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally (Stage 1) and a formal complaint which will require investigation (Stages 2 and 3).

2. Complaints Procedure

Timescales

We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to 'working days' we mean Monday to Friday,



when the College is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the College's web site. These procedures need to be applied with common sense and judgement. If a complaint is raised out of term time, the complainant cannot expect the timescales below to be strictly adhered to, although every reasonable effort will be made to address the complaint in a timely manner.

Confidentiality

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2, or Stage 3. Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential. However, the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be supplied to tutors, staff, parents and students upon their request.

I. Stage 1 (An Informal Complaint)

Anyone who has a concern or difficulty is encouraged to discuss this informally with the Academic Principal or Director of Studies in the first instance. Most complaints can be successfully resolved at this stage.

We expect most concerns, where a parent, tutor, staff member or student seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include: dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care; dissatisfaction about allocation of privileges or responsibilities; timetable clashes; an invoicing error; or concerns about the performance of some other aspect of the College's systems or equipment.

Acknowledgement

We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, fax, e-mail, or letter within two working days or receipt.

Unresolved Concerns

A concern which has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days should be notified in writing as a formal complaint which will be dealt with in accordance to Stage 2 below.

II. Stage 2 (A Formal Complaint)

If an informal complaint fails to resolve the matter, it can be raised as a formal complaint to the College in writing addressed to the Chief Operating Officer (COO), Kim Terrar. Employees of the College should refer to our Grievance Procedure for further details at this stage.

Notification

An unresolved concern under Stage 1, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a specific dissatisfaction with some aspect of the College's policies, procedures, management, or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and the full contact details of the complaint in an envelope addressed to the COO.



Investigation

The COO may request additional information from the complainant and will probably wish to speak to him/her personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The complainant will be notified of the outcome of the investigation and the reasons for that outcome. Confidential written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to any complaint.

Outcome

The COO will aim to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint within 28 working days from the receipt of the complaint. Please note that any complaint received within one month of half term or the end of term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of personnel.

III. Stage 3 (Further Steps)

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome and the COO's decision, then the complaint can be renewed in writing to the Designated Proprietor Dr. Mario Peters and/or a Complaints Committee (which will not include the Designated Proprietor or the COO). Complainants are invited to follow the procedure below:

Notification

A complainant should write to the Designated Proprietor within five working days of receiving the outcome of the complaint.

Oxford International College
The Old Convent
Beeches Green
Stroud GL5 4AD

The letter to the Designated Proprietor should give full details of the complaint and enclose all relevant documents and full contact details of the complainant. The letter will normally be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within four working days, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

Action by the Designated Proprietor

The Designated Proprietor will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. When he is satisfied that he has established all of the material facts and relevant policies, so far as is practicable, he will notify the complainant in writing of his decision and his reasons for it. He will aim to provide a response within ten working days of receipt of a letter of complaint. If the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, then s/he then ask for the complaint to be referred to a Complaints Committee.

Deference to the Complaints Committee

A committee hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the COO and the Designated Proprietor. The committee will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.



The committee's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaint that has been made considering:

- The documents provided by both parties
- Any representations made by the complainant, the COO and the Designated Proprietor

If, after establishing the facts, the committee decides that the complaint is valid they will uphold the complaint. If the committee decides that the complaint is not valid, they will dismiss the complaint.

It is not within the powers of the committee to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, tutors, students or parents. The committee, however, may make recommendations as appropriate.

The committee will be comprised of members who are independent of the management and running of the College. Normally the committee will include a minimum of three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint.

To request a hearing before the complaints committee please write to the address below within five working days of the disputed outcome:

Oxford International College
The Old Convent
Beeches Green
Stroud GL5 4AD

A request will only be considered after the procedures of Stage 1 and Stage 2 have been completed. Please ensure that any letter to the Complaints Committee also includes a copy of all relevant documents, a list of all documents that pertain to the complaint that may be in the possession of the College, and full contact details of the complainant. The letter of complaint should clearly state the grounds for the complaint and the desired outcome. A representative of the complaints committee will acknowledge the complaint within two working days.

The complaints committee will convene as soon as is reasonably practicable, but will not normally convene in half term or school holidays. Every effort will be made to ensure that the complaints committee hearing takes place within ten working days of receipt of a request. The complainant may ask who has been appointed to the Complaints Committee, but as soon as is reasonably practical or at least seven working days before the hearing the complainant will receive written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing and brief details of the complaints committee members who will be present. The committee will be chaired by one of its members, who will be selected amongst themselves.

After notification of the date of the hearing any additional documents (potentially records pertaining to the outcomes of stages 1 and 2) must be supplied to the committee within three working days. It is expected that most of, if not all, relevant documentation will have already been submitted in the initial request to convene a complaints committee.



A Complaints Committee Hearing

Although a complainant does not need to attend the hearing, s/he will be invited to do so. S/he may be accompanied by one other person, such as a relative, friend, or teacher. It is not necessary that the chosen person be a legally qualified person, or a person who will act in their professional capacity. However, if the chosen person will be acting in their professional capacity, we request that the College be notified five working days before the hearing. In a circumstance where the complainant is a parent or guardian, the student for whom they care may also attend the hearing at the discretion of the chair.

The hearing will be conducted by the chair in an informal manner. All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. Everyone present will be entitled to write their own notes for reference purposes, although formal minutes of the proceedings will also be taken.

The chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding, and the committee shall be under no obligation to hear evidence from witnesses. However, if the committee so chooses it may take testimony, in person or written statements, into account. All those present are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners.

The committee may be adjourned for several reasons, at the discretion of the chair. In these instances the hearing will reconvene at a later time or date agreed by those present.

- If after due warning those present do not conduct themselves in an appropriate and productive manner, the chair may adjourn the hearing.
- If it is deemed necessary that further investigation takes place, the chair may adjourn the hearing.
- If it is deemed that legal advice must be taken, the chair may adjourn the hearing.

The hearing may also be terminated, at the discretion of the chair, for example in the case that the conduct of those present is so obstreperous as to prevent reasoned and dispassionate considerations of the complaint. If the hearing is terminated then the original decision taken by the COO will stand.

Any person who is dissatisfied with the way in which the hearing is being conducted must say so before the proceedings conclude so that these remarks can be minuted.

The committee will duly consider all of the matters discussed in the hearing and reach a decision as to the most appropriate resolution of the complaint. The committee's findings and recommendations will be shared with those present orally at the end of the hearing. The reasoning behind the committee's decision will also be explained. Should the committee wish to deliberate at such length that it is not possible to notify those present after the hearing, they will instead notify those present of the outcome by electronic mail within seven working days of the hearing. If you would not like to be notified by electronic mail, please ensure that you say so at the end of the hearing. The decision, findings and recommendations of the committee will be made available for inspection on the College premises by the Designated Proprietor.