



Student Complaints Policy and Procedures (Awarding Body – De Montfort University)

Version 6

Approved by Board of Governors

Last Amendment: September 2023

This document sets out the School's policy and procedures for responding to students' concerns and complaints about the standard of service provided by the School.

It has been reviewed and developed in line with *England's Regulatory Framework for Higher Education* and takes on board the accompanying guidance with regard to Complaints, Concerns and Appeals; due regard is also given to:

- i. *The Competition and Market Authority's UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law;*
- ii. *The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)'s Good Practice Framework*



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*The document owner is responsible for maintaining and updating the content of this document and ensuring that it reflects current practice at the School.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. A student may choose to file a complaint if they are dissatisfied with a service they have received and want the matter investigated.
- 1.2. Where complaints concern processes or services associated with the awarding body, De Montfort University, students should raise a complaint with them directly using the DMU Student Complaints procedure.
- 1.3. Complaints about London School of Science and Technology services or processes should be directed to LSST and will be handled in accordance with the LSST complaints policy and procedure. If the students are still dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the option to file a formal complaint about LSST with the awarding body DMU. In equal measure, LSST reserves the right to refer the complaint and student to DMU for further management and investigation if it determines that the complaint would be better handled by DMU in accordance with the partnership agreement.
- 1.4. Former students who have withdrawn, completed their degree, or interrupted/deferred their studies have the right to file a complaint; however, this complaint must be received by LSST within three months of the student's last engagement date as stated on the student's management system.
- 1.5. Any evidence submitted as part of a complaint will be deemed appropriate for use in any other procedures. If another procedure is deemed more appropriate, the LSST and/or DMU may consider the complaint at any stage. If this is the case, the student will be informed as soon as possible as to why this decision was made.
- 1.6. Complaints deemed malicious will not be accepted and will be rejected upon receipt. In these cases, the student is given written reasons for the rejection. Students who file a complaint of this nature may face disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct policy at LSST.
- 1.7. Most complaints should be filed by students themselves; however, when a complaint is to be pursued by a third party, such as a parent or guardian, the student must provide written confirmation, either by email or letter, confirming their student ID number and stating their permission for a third party to act on their behalf before the complaint will be considered. The student reserves the right to revoke the third party's permissions at any time; in this case, regardless of the complaint stage, the complaint will be rejected by LSST with immediate effect. LSST accepts no responsibility for the actions of a third party.
- 1.8. Any student complaint about the programme, modules, or credits that are not resolved using LSST's policies and procedures should be reported to De Montfort University via their Student Complaint's Procedure.



2. Principles for Handling Student's Complaints

- 2.1. The London School of Science and Technology (LSST) strives to provide a high-quality academic experience and encourages students to raise concerns with the School if any aspect of their learning experience falls short of their expectations.
- 2.2. The School will consider students' concerns and complaints at three stages:
 - 2.2.1. Stage 1: Informal, local/early resolution
 - 2.2.2. Stage 2: Formal complaints procedure
 - 2.2.3. Stage 3: Review of formal complaint outcome

The full complaints procedure is given in Section 3

- 2.3. The School will make every effort to resolve all complaints and concerns in the first instance through informal dialogue between those directly involved, as this is often the quickest and most effective method of resolution. Students should file a formal complaint if informal conciliation is not possible.
- 2.4. The School will ensure that procedures for dealing with formal complaints are fair and transparent to all parties, and that complaints are resolved in a timely fashion; where possible the School will seek to resolve all formal complaints fully (including any review under Stage 3) within 90 calendar days of the receipt of a formal complaint.
- 2.5. Students will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of the School's formal complaint investigation. If a complaint takes more than 90 calendar days to resolve, the complainant will be given an explanation and an estimate of how long the issue will take to fully resolve.
- 2.6. All complaints will be taken seriously and investigated in the spirit of natural justice; no student will be penalised for making a genuine complaint, even if it is found to be without merit, if made in good faith. Any person who is the subject of a complaint must be given a copy of the complaint and the opportunity to make representations.
- 2.7. The School will ensure that all students and prospective students have clear access to advice and guidance on filing a formal complaint. When students request it, Student Support staff will walk them through the process of filing a formal complaint.
- 2.8. The School will use anonymised information about the number and nature of student complaints to reflect on its performance in providing learning opportunities and to drive continuous improvement of the services it provides.
- 2.9. The School shall keep a record of all complaints made by students about the course, as well as the outcome of each complaint.



2.10. At the end of the relevant procedure, the School will issue the Completion of Procedures Letter, allowing the student to file a complaint with the OIA if they so desire.

3. Scope of LSST's Complaints Policy

Important:

- 3.1. LSST provides learning opportunities through validation and franchise agreements with external awarding bodies, with whom it collaborates to resolve formal complaints from students. The procedures for filing formal complaints differ depending on the course in which a student is enrolled.
- 3.2. Regardless of who is in charge of receiving and processing formal complaints, LSST will collaborate with its awarding body partners to ensure that all complaints are handled in accordance with the standards outlined in the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Good Practice Framework.
- 3.3. If a student is unsure how to file a formal complaint, they should consult a member of the Student Support team, who will walk them through the process.



4. Definition of a Complaint

4.1. For the purpose of this policy, a complaint is defined as:

'An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about a provider's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by the School'.

4.2. This procedure is designed to deal with complaints arising from:

- provision of academic services described in the School's publications including teaching, content of courses and support for learning;
- incorrect or misleading information about services provided by the School;
- provision of other services described in literature published by the School;
- problems with the provision, condition or accessibility of School facilities or learning resources;
- the conduct of our staff or of any contractors we employ;
- any perceived inequitable treatment of individuals or unlawful discrimination*

**Serious instances of discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation may warrant separate investigation under LSST's Anti-bullying and Harassment procedures.*

4.3. The student complaints procedure does not cover the following:

- i. Complaints about admissions procedures prior to enrolment as a student of the School, which are dealt with separately under the School's *Admissions Policy*;
- ii. Any matters relating to examination and assessment procedures or academic appeals, which are dealt with through the *Appeals Policy*;



- 4.4. Complaints about other students' behaviour will normally be considered under the School's *Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures*, unless they are indicative of the School's failure to provide a safe and respectful study environment in accordance with its own policies. The Registrar will use their discretion in determining the best way to handle such complaints.
- 4.5. **Note: If a complaint is linked to a specific request (for example, a change of class), the request will not be processed until the complaint is investigated and closed.**

5. The Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: Early (Informal) Resolution

- 5.1. Before filing a formal complaint, a student should consult with their Personal Tutor, a Student Representative, a member of the Student Support Team, or the Student Union.
- 5.2. The concern may be raised orally, in writing or by email, and should ideally be given within 10 working days of the incident or action from which the complaint arises, or in any event as soon as possible.
- 5.3. School personnel will collaborate with the complainant to resolve concerns in a timely and decisive manner, without resorting to the formal complaints process. When a formal complaint is received and it is not obvious that informal resolution was attempted, or there is no clear indication that informal resolution is inappropriate, the complaint is typically referred back to this stage.
- 5.4. A member of staff who receives an informal complaint will attempt to resolve the matter immediately or refer the matter to someone who can assist.
- 5.5. If a concern cannot be resolved informally between the affected parties for any reason, the student should file a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal Complaints Procedure

- 5.6. Formal complaints should be made in writing (letter or email) to the Registrar within 20 working days of the incident or action that gave rise to the complaint, or the outcome of the informal resolution. Complaints received after the advised time may be considered 'out of time' and will be investigated only if it can be demonstrated that the complaint could not have been



raised at the time; decisions on whether to investigate 'out of time' complaints are at the discretion of the Head of Registry.

5.7. It is preferred that students use the Student Complaint Form available on the VLE or from Student Support. If providing the School with a physical copy of the complaint, the following address should be used:

*F.A.O. Head of Registry,
The London School of Science and Technology,
First Floor, Memo House,
Kendal Avenue, Park Royal, W3 0XA*

Or the complaint can be submitted electronically to: registry@lsst.ac

5.8. The following details must be provided when making a formal complaint:

- the student's name and ID number*;
- a full statement of the substance and circumstances of the complaint and all persons involved (if known);
- brief details of the steps already taken to resolve the complaint;
- reasons for the student's dissatisfaction with the attempts to resolve the complaint informally;
- the desired outcome of the complaint
- copies of any documentary evidence the student wishes to submit (original copies should not be provided);
- a preferred means of contacting students on the issue.

5.9. Complaints submitted anonymously will be rejected on immediate receipt.

5.10. The Registrar will determine whether all required information has been provided and will contact the student if additional details and evidence are required. The Registrar will always acknowledge receipt of the complaint via letter/email.

5.11. The Registrar will refer the complaint to the appropriate person or department within the School, who will conduct an investigation based on the information provided by the complainant in their written submission. A written response will be sent to the complainant within 20 working days of the School receiving the formal complaint, with any outstanding actions to be completed within the 90-day timeframe. Responses to the complainant must be copied to the Registrar and all other parties involved.

5.12. In instances where it has not been possible to resolve the complaint within the School's 20-day target, the person/s investigating the complaint shall promptly write to the student and inform them of:

- The name of the person/s investigating their complaint,



- The reason for the delay,
- The date by which the student will be notified of the outcome.

5.13. The Registrar and all relevant parties will be copied on the letter sent to the student.

5.14. If it is determined that the complaint is unfounded, the complainant will be given an explanation as to why. In certain cases where a complaint is partially upheld, the Registrar may exercise discretion in making a conciliatory or goodwill gesture.

5.15. If the Registrar is the subject of the complaint, the formal complaint should be directed to the Principal, who will manage the response to the complaint or delegate this duty to an appropriate person.

5.16. At the conclusion of the formal complaints procedure, the Student will receive a formal letter or email clearly explaining the outcome and the actions the School has taken or will take to resolve the issue. If the student has concerns about how their complaint was handled, the letter will include instructions on how to request a review of the decision (Stage 3).



The Investigation Procedure

5.17. The investigation will be carried out by the appointed investigating officer and will comprise of the following steps:

- i. A separate appointment with the complainant and respondent will be organised within 5 working days of receipt of the formal complaint. At the meeting the complainant/respondent will be provided the opportunity to outline and further detail the main issues stated in the complaint and provide additional evidence or information relevant to the case. The investigating officer may also have questions prepared they wish to address. This meeting will be conducted informally and comprise of the complainant/respondent, investigating officer, note-taker (if not the investigating officer), and a friend, colleague or Student Union representative that the complainant/respondent may choose to accompany them. No legal representation can be present at this stage for either party. Should the complainant or respondent choose not to attend, the outcome will be based on the evidence already available. Recording of the meetings are only allowed where all attendees have given consent. All attendees should be permitted the opportunity to request and review any notes or recordings made during this meeting.
- ii. An investigation into the issues mentioned in the complaint will be carried out by the investigating officer who will produce a comprehensive written report on the findings. This report will be given a general timescale of 20 working days for completion; however, this may not be possible to achieve due to availability of resources or staff and/or nature of the complaint. In this case, additional time may be granted to the investigating officer and the complainant will be notified of this update. The report should address all matters raised by the complainant in their complaint and detail the time and date of any meeting held as part of the investigation. All evidence relevant to the case should be made available to all parties, with the exception of evidence which must be withheld to meet GDPR requirements.
- iii. Once the investigation is completed, an outcome will be provided. The outcome will be stated in the report, along with clear and detailed reasons for the decision. Following that, a Complaints Panel will be convened, consisting of the investigating officer, Registrar, Campus Dean, Head of Student Lifecycle, and Registry Officer (minute taker), to discuss the findings of the complaint and determine whether the complaint should be upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld. Depending on the outcome, a resolution and/or additional recommendations may be reached.

5.18. The Registrar will notify the complainant of the outcome of the complaint via email/letter within five working days of the Panel's decision. Any agreed-upon recommendations and/or resolutions will also be communicated in this correspondence. The complainant will have 10 working days to respond to the decision, whether they wish to decline or accept the outcome, as well as proposed recommendations and/or resolution. If the complainant wishes to pursue the matter further, they must communicate their desire to proceed to stage 3 as outlined below. If the student agrees to the outcome or fails to respond within the 10-working-day window, they



will receive an email/letter closing the complaint based on the previously communicated decision.

Stage 3: Review of Formal Complaints Outcomes

- 5.19. If a student believes that their complaint was not handled fairly, objectively, or in accordance with the procedures outlined above, they should write to the Principal within 20 working days of receiving the formal stage outcome letter to request a review of the decision. Students can request a review by emailing the Registry. This will be forwarded to the Principal by the Registry.
- 5.20. A review of a formal complaint decision will be considered only where there is evidence that:
- i. The procedures during the formal stage were not followed properly,
 - ii. The outcome was not reasonable given the circumstances presented,
 - iii. The outcome was not consistent with the outcome of any other similar complaints,
 - iv. New information has come to light which was unavailable, for valid reasons, or could not have been considered earlier in the process and which would have had a significant ('material') effect on the decision.
- 5.21. Dissatisfaction with the outcome of a complaint is not enough to warrant a review of a formal complaint decision.
- 5.22. The review of the formal complaint outcome will not consider any new issues raised by the student that were not part of the original investigation, will not re-investigate the original investigation, and will not treat the complainant as a new case.
- 5.23. If the Principal determines that there is a valid case to investigate, they will appoint an investigating officer, who will not have been involved in any previous stage in the handling of the complaint. The investigating officer will consider the integrity of the original decision in respect of the request for review and any supporting evidence submitted; their findings will be presented in a report to the Principal with 10 working days of being instructed to investigate.
- 5.24. On receipt of the investigating officer's report, the Principal will convene a Complaints Panel meeting to consider the integrity of the original complaint outcome in light of the report's findings; the membership of the panel will vary to ensure that no person involved in the original decision under review has any influence over the outcome of the Panel's deliberations.



- 5.25. In light of the investigating officer's report, the Complaints Panel will move to uphold, partially uphold, or rescind the earlier decision, specifying any remedial actions and the timeframes within which these must be carried out.
- 5.26. Following the panel meeting, the outcome of the panel's deliberations, and the rationale for its decisions will be conveyed by letter/email to the student and, where appropriate, other parties. This letter will advise the student of any further recourse for review that may be available to them.

6. Awarding Body Appeals and Referrals to the OIA

- 6.1. If a student is still unhappy with the outcome after the School's internal complaints procedures have been exhausted, they may request a review of the decision by their course's awarding body, DMU. Students should contact DMU directly if they want to learn more about this process.
- 6.2. The Student Support staff will assist the student in following the proper procedures for escalating a complaint to the awarding body for additional review; the awarding body will conduct an investigation in accordance with its policies and procedures.
- 6.3. Any further actions arising from the awarding body's consideration of the complaint will be agreed between the School and the awarding body, and will be promptly notified to the student in a Completion of Procedures letter. The letter will set out in detail all steps taken in considering the complaint, any action taken to resolve it and the rationale for the School and the awarding body's final decisions.
- 6.4. **The Completion of Procedures letter will mark the conclusion of the internal complaints and appeals process.**
- 6.5. The School participates in the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) program for independent examination of complaints and appeals. Students who believe their complaint was not handled appropriately or equitably by the School or the awarding body may request that the OIA conduct an independent investigation; when such petitions are suitable for review, the OIA will investigate in accordance with its rules.
- 6.6. Any referral to the OIA must be made within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter and must be made using the OIA's complaints form, which can be accessed here: <http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx>
- 6.7. Further information on the OIA's procedures and eligibility for review of a complaint can be found on the OIA's website; www.oiahe.org.uk, or alternatively students can contact the OIA

directly on

- Tel: 0118 959 9813
- Email: enquiries@oiahe.org

7. Complainants' Conduct

- 7.1. While it is anticipated that a complainant may feel anxious as a result of the circumstances surrounding their complaint, they are expected to behave reasonably and in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct.
- 7.2. Students are required to refrain from filing frivolous, vexatious, petty, or harassing complaints, or from making excessive demands of those handling their complaint. Unacceptable requests on the part of the complainant may include: asking responses in an unreasonable timescale; insisting on seeing or speaking with a specific member of staff; making repeated phone calls, emails, or letters; changing the topic of the complaint repeatedly, or presenting irrelevant concerns.
- 7.3. If the complainant is found to be acting unreasonable, they shall be informed as to why this is inappropriate and given the opportunity to change their behaviour. If the unreasonable behaviour continues, the School will take appropriate action, such as reporting pupils to disciplinary procedures and ending the investigation into the complaint.



8. Formal Investigations

- 8.1. The School may initiate a formal investigation into the issue during Stages 2 and 3 of the complaints procedure.
- 8.2. As part of the investigative procedure, the member of staff handling the allegation may request that the complainant attend an interview. The employee will agree on a day, time, and location with the complainant and confirm it in writing. The complainant has the right to be joined as an observer by a friend or student representative.
- 8.3. Any individual about whom a complaint is filed (the "respondent") will be given a copy of the complaint in adequate time to prepare their representations prior to any formal meeting concerning the complaint; the respondent shall have the same right of representation as the complainant.
- 8.4. If either the complainant or respondent is accompanied in a formal meeting, the details of their companion must be disclosed to the investigating officer in advance of the meeting; the School does not enable an external organisation or professional legal representation during such investigations.



9. Complaints about Staff Members or Other Students

9.1. If a student files a complaint alleging that staff or students violated School policies, the matter will be investigated using the appropriate investigative procedure, which may be the School's:

- Student or Staff Disciplinary Procedures
- Assessments Regulations and Procedures
- Academic Misconduct Regulations

This includes, but is not limited to, abusive or threatening behaviour, victimisation, bullying or harassing behaviour, actions likely to cause injury or threaten safety and unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.

Note: Where the issue is referred to be dealt with under a different School policy, then the 90-day timeframe given for resolving complaints may no longer apply.

9.2. If a complaint results in a hearing under another procedure or policy, the complainant may be asked to give evidence at a hearing. In instances where the complainant is not willing to give evidence, the School may not be able to proceed with the case.

9.3. Where the complaint results in a hearing under another procedure or policy, the School will comply with the provisions of the *Data Protection Act*. This means that the School may not be able to disclose full details of this procedure and any outcomes to the complainant. Legally, there is a recognised expectation that internal disciplinary matters of an individual will be private. If the School is unable to disclose the details of the outcome to the student, the student will be informed of the reasons for any such non-disclosure.

10. Record Keeping and Confidentiality

10.1. As part of the School's monitoring and quality assurance activities, the Registrar will keep a record of student complaints and the means of settlement and submit it to the Academic Board.

10.2. School officials dealing with complaints may receive potentially sensitive information about students' personal situations; all such information supplied by the student when making a complaint will be maintained securely inside the Registry Office and shared only with those who need to know in order to carry out these processes.



10.3. It is expected that those in receipt of concerns and complaints will respect confidentiality and retain anonymity for students raising concerns where this is appropriate. However, complainants should never be promised confidentiality as there may be instances where information disclosed must be passed on to fulfil a public function (such as reporting a crime).

10.4. Anyone dealing with a concern or complaint who is unsure whether information is confidential should clarify with the source of the information and speak to the School's Data Protection Officer:

it@lsst.ac

11. Training and Awareness of the Complaints Policy and Procedures

11.1. The School will organise events on a regular basis to enhance awareness of the Complaints Procedure and how it should be utilised; students will have access to information about this policy and the proper process of making a complaint in their Student Handbooks and during induction.

11.2. The School will also give continuous support and direction to LSST Staff on how to appropriately address informal complaints and respond to formal complaints.

12. Review and Update

12.1. This policy and procedure will be reviewed and updated annually by the Head of Registry and the School's Quality Office; changes to it will be reviewed by the Executive Committee and ratified by the School's Board of Governors.



Version History

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