

# Girton College Student Complaints Procedure



Approved by Council on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2022.

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## Overview

The College welcomes comments and suggestions from students about any aspect of College provision. A student wishing to make a suggestion or comment about the College's provision, either academic or non-academic, can do so informally at the point of delivery, or by contacting the person in charge of the relevant area, or where it seems appropriate by raising the matter with their Tutor or the Senior Tutor.

Occasionally, however, a student may wish to make a complaint about College provision. The College subscribes to the guidelines agreed by the Senior Tutors' Committee for the handling of student complaints, and this document sets out the procedure for making a complaint to the College.

## Matters falling outside the complaints procedure

### Academic Appeals

- Students should be aware that a separate procedure exists for appealing to the University in a case where a student feels that they have been disadvantaged or unfairly classified in a University examination. Students are advised to contact their Tutor for information about examination allowances and appeals.
- Students who fail University examinations where an appeal to the University has been unsuccessful will be referred to [Rule of Behaviour 1g, in relation to Statute XIV](#).

### Harassment by another student

- A complaint relating to harassment by another student will be dealt with under the [College's Policy on Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination](#). However, if a student's complaint relates to the operation of that policy and the decision-making process, then this procedure should be used.

## Criminal offence

- Where a complaint includes an allegation that an offence of a criminal nature has been committed, it may be reported to the police. In so far as there is no conflict of interest, the College will seek to offer advice and support to students involved in such cases, and they may wish to seek legal advice.

## Content of College Policy

- Complaints about the contents of College policies should be directed to the appropriate College committee through student representatives (the JCR or MCR), or via the Complainant's Tutor or Senior Tutor.

## Student Discipline

- This will normally be dealt with through the [Student Discipline Procedure](#). However, if the student's complaint relates to the operation of that policy and the decision-making process, then this procedure should be used.

## Scope and principles

1. The College recognises that it has a duty to provide fair and objective procedures for examining and resolving complaints, and to ensure that its procedures are free from partiality arising from personal or institutional conflict of interest or other sources of bias. No student will be disadvantaged by having raised a complaint in good faith, even if it is not upheld, but the College expects that students will not make frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints. Complaints that are demonstrably malicious may be referred to the [Student Discipline Procedure](#).
2. The College anticipates that complaints will normally be dealt with informally in the first instance. A student with a complaint should seek to bring it to the attention of the College using the procedure outlined here as soon as possible following the occurrence of a problem and ideally within one calendar month. Many complaints can be dealt with quickly and effectively in this manner, without recourse to formal procedure. The College's procedures have been developed with this in mind.
3. Every attempt will be made to maintain the confidentiality of a Complainant. However, where a complaint is of a personal nature against an individual, it is likely that the Complainant's identity will have to be revealed at some stage in all but the most exceptional cases for there to be a fair investigation. The College will endeavour to inform an individual Complainant of the extent to which their identity is likely to be revealed at each stage of the procedure, and data will be stored by the College in accordance with the [Data Protection Policy](#).
4. To assist in the process of auditing the quality of its services and responsiveness to student comments, suggestions and complaints, the College will monitor complaints. The College undertakes to respect the confidentiality of Complainants in this exercise. The Senior Tutor is responsible for monitoring the use of this procedure.
5. A student may wish to complain about a matter that is not within the control of the College but within that of another Cambridge institution, e.g. a Department, Faculty, the University or another College. The University has a [Student Complaints Procedure](#) that covers Faculties, Departments, and other University institutions, and all Colleges have comparable written procedures. In this case, the first thing to do will be to identify the appropriate point of contact within the Faculty, Department or College. You may either contact that person

directly or ask your Director of Studies, your Tutor, or the Senior Tutor of Girton to take up the matter on your behalf. The College has a responsibility to help students to identify mechanisms and to offer appropriate assistance in making a complaint within the University.

6. Complaints relating to the behaviour of contractors and others working for the College should not be taken up directly with the individual concerned but should be made (either by the student personally or through a Tutor) to the College Office responsible for the contract (generally the Maintenance Office).
7. Complainants will be invited at the outset to indicate the form of remedy they are seeking, without prejudice to the final remedy if any. Complainants will be notified where a remedy is applied, and provided with any details that directly affect them.
8. A student who is considering making a complaint may wish to seek help or advice from the [Senior Tutor](#) or their College Tutor.

### Stage 1: Discussion and advice

9. Students who experience a problem with any aspect of College provision should where possible first raise the matter with the individual who has handled the matter or the person responsible for the area to which the complaint relates, either directly or, if preferred, through a College Tutor. The College Tutor or Senior Tutor, in consultation with relevant officers, will set up a meeting with the relevant individuals to discuss and seek to resolve the matter through discussion.

### Stage 2: Informal procedure

10. In cases where a student feels that the nature of the complaint is too serious to be dealt with informally by themselves or through a Tutor, or where, after the relevant Head of Department/Service has been approached, a satisfactory conclusion has not been reached, a complaint should be made in writing to the Complaints Officer (who shall normally be the Senior Tutor), who will investigate the matter as soon as possible, and will invite a written statement from the person or persons complained against. An initial response to any complaint can normally be expected within ten working days of its receipt, and a considered response to the complaint, in writing giving reasons for the decision, and confirming whether a remedy as per paragraph 7 above has been applied, should normally be received within a further fifteen working days. Any remedy will be implemented with the minimum of delay.
11. Complaints should be made in writing, normally to the [Senior Tutor](#), normally within 40 days of the issue that gave rise to the complaint. The complaint should detail:
  - Specific nature of the complaint, including time, place, date, people involved;
  - Evidence pertaining to the complaint, which should be clearly labelled, dated and specific to the complaint;
  - A statement of steps already taken to resolve the complaint through discussion, and why this was not successful; or the reasons why such resolution were not possible. If a complaint is directed initially to the formal procedure, the reasons for this should be clearly stated;
  - The form of resolution or remedy that is sought.

12. There may be occasions when several students wish to make a joint complaint (e.g. about a problem affecting a number of people in College accommodation, or about a teaching problem). If no member of the group is willing to act as spokesperson, it is suggested that the help of a JCR or MCR committee member or other student representative (i.e. someone not involved in the matter concerned) should be enlisted to act for the group through the informal procedure outlined above, and this person could be accompanied by one or two other members of the group.
13. In any complaint about an individual member of staff, the Senior Tutor will contact the appropriate Head of Department and/or HR as necessary.
14. If a complaint is against the Senior Tutor, the complaint should be put in writing to the Mistress, who will act as Complaints Officer or nominate a deputy from Governing Body.

### Stage 3: Formal procedure

15. It is hoped that very few complaints will remain unresolved after the informal stage. If the Complainant is unhappy with informal resolution, however, they can request that the Complaints Officer refer the complaint to a Student Complaints Committee within 7 days of receipt of the outcome of the informal process.
16. The Committee shall consist of the Complaints Officer and two Fellows from Governing Body with appropriate expertise, and optionally one member of the College *in statu pupillari*<sup>1</sup> (who shall normally be a trustee member of the JCR or the MCR). No person who has had, or may have, any personal involvement in the matter to which the complaint relates shall be a member of the Student Complaints Committee. If the Complaints Officer is thus debarred from acting, their place on the Committee shall be taken by the Mistress or their nominated deputy from Governing Body.
17. The Student Complaints Committee shall receive a copy of all documentation relating to the informal stage of the Complaints Procedure. The Chair shall write to the Complainant informing them of the composition of the Committee and the date on which it is to meet, and soliciting any further submissions in writing which the Complainant may wish to make. The Chair shall at the same time write to any person or persons against whom the complaint is made, informing them of the complaint which has been made, of the composition of the Committee and the date on which it is to meet, and inviting them to make submissions in writing for the Committee to consider at least 14 days in advance of the meeting.
18. Both the Complainant and any person against whom the complaint is made shall have the right to attend in person at the meeting of the Committee to make oral submissions, although the Committee's deliberations, following hearing of the submissions, shall be held in private. The Complainant and any person against whom the complaint is made shall, if attending in person, be entitled to be accompanied by another person of their choosing. The Committee may require the attendance of, and hear evidence from, any other person or persons as it thinks fit.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this policy College Council has agreed, as of 1.10.19, *in statu pupillari* is taken to mean all members of the JCR and MCR.

19. The Committee shall come to a decision as soon as possible after the hearing of the case, and shall, normally within four weeks of the date when the matter was first referred to this formal procedure, give to the Complainant and to any person or persons against whom the complaint is made a full written statement of its response to the complaint, giving reasons for its decision, and confirming whether a remedy has been applied and any details that directly affect them. Any remedy shall be implemented with the minimum of delay.

### Appeals Procedure

20. Should a Complainant wish to appeal against a decision made by the Student Complaints Committee under this formal procedure, an appeal may be made to a Student Appeals Panel consisting of three persons selected from a group of external reviewers to be appointed annually by the College Council (Student Appeals Panel). At least one member of the Student Appeals Panel should have appropriate legal training.
21. A Complainant who is dissatisfied with a decision of the Student Appeals Panel may make a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

### Documentation and reporting

22. The College will keep a record of complaints made under this procedure and resolutions adopted. The responsibility for this lies with the Senior Tutor.
23. Any significant complaints relating to the Code of Practice on the Management of student housing are reported to ANUK under the agreed process.

### Seeking help and support

Porters Lodge: 01223 338999 24 hours a day

Senior Tutor: [senior.tutor@girton.cam.ac.uk](mailto:senior.tutor@girton.cam.ac.uk)

College Tutor

College Nurses: 01223 338937 [nurses@girton.cam.ac.uk](mailto:nurses@girton.cam.ac.uk) and bookable on Moodle

College Student Administrative Services

Chaplain [chaplain@girton.cam.ac.uk](mailto:chaplain@girton.cam.ac.uk)

College Discrimination and Harassment Contacts

- Dr Amy Donovan [cdhc@girton.cam.ac.uk](mailto:cdhc@girton.cam.ac.uk)
- Senior Tutor [senior.tutor@girton.cam.ac.uk](mailto:senior.tutor@girton.cam.ac.uk)

JCR welfare officers

MCR welfare officers

### [Student Advice Services](#)

You can find further information about sources of support on the College website

## Glossary

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Complaints Officer | A Senior Member of the College, normally the Senior Tutor, who is charged with leading the resolution of a complaint.   |
| Complainant        | A student member of College who has made a complaint under this procedure   |
| Student            | Members of college <i>in statu pupillari</i> <sup>2</sup> of the College (A matriculated student following a course leading to the award of a degree, diploma, or certificate of the University). |

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