

## **Introduction**

SPTI evaluates their processes for programme monitoring and review and take action to improve them where necessary, and we involve students in programme monitoring and review processes. It is one of the values of SPTI to seek to develop and improve standards through reflection on practice and we therefore welcome and encourage constructive feedback from trainees on any aspect of their training experience. A variety of vehicles for student feedback are in place, including module feedback forms, student meetings at the end of each workshop, direct contact with Programme Leaders and Tutors, and student representation on the Combined Programme Committee which meets twice a year. We encourage students to use any of these avenues to raise issues of concern to them at any point in their training and in particular to use relationships with Programme Leaders and tutors to define and resolve problems informally before they escalate into a more formal complaint.

## **Scope of the policy**

We recognise that there may be instances when such informal resolution may not be possible and when a more formal process may be necessary. There are 'procedures which encourage constructive engagement with the appeals and complaints process that offer opportunities for early and/or informal resolution.' This document outlines both the informal and formal procedures which are followed in situations where a student has a complaint regarding any of the following:

- The provision of programmes of study by SPTI
- Services or facilities provided by SPTI
- Administrative systems or policies operated by SPTI

'Clear and accurate advice and guidance is available for students making an appeal or complaint, and for staff involved in handling or supporting appeals and complaints.' It is our belief that direct and personal communication about issues giving rise to complaints is the most effective and satisfactory way of resolving them and all complainants are urged to seek to resolve their complaint informally either before embarking on the formal procedure or at any stage during it.

A student complaint is defined as:

*'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about an Institute's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Institute'*

(OIA Good Practice Framework for handling complaints and academic appeals, 2016)

This procedure does not apply to:

- complaints about academic marks, grades or awards. These are dealt with under the Student Appeals Procedure:  
<https://www.staffs.ac.uk/legal/policies/complaints-appeals-procedure.jsp>.
- a review of Exceptional Circumstances decisions
- complaints relating to the conduct of other students in training. These are dealt with under the Student Disciplinary Procedure
- anonymous complaints or those submitted by a third party. These will not be accepted.

## **Frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints**

Complainants using this procedure in good faith may do so without fear of recrimination. SPTI provides opportunities for students to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage. However, making a frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaint will be regarded as an abuse of process and may result in disciplinary action being taken under the Student Disciplinary Procedure. The following are examples of frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints, though the list is not exhaustive:

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- complaints which tend towards obsession, harassment or which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- unreasonable insistence on pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes
- insistence on pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value

Where SPTI believes a complaint to be frivolous, vexatious or malicious, SPTI will notify the complainant as soon as possible that consideration of the complaint is being terminated, giving reasons for the decision. SPTI will also consider whether the Student Disciplinary Procedure should be invoked and, if so, will notify the Complainant accordingly.

### **1. Stage 1: Informal Resolution**

- 1.1. Most complaints can be resolved informally and, where practicable, a complaint should be dealt with as soon as possible and as close as possible to the point at which it has arisen.
- 1.2. A complaint should be raised initially with the member of staff responsible for dealing on a day to day basis with the matter being complained about (e.g. Tutor delivering a workshop, Programme Leader in relation to wider issues of course delivery, Business Manager in relation to financial matters and so on). Where a complaint is specifically about a module or programme, a Complainant can also ask their student representative to raise matters through the Combined Programme Committee.
- 1.3. A complaint should normally be raised within 2 months of the events complained about. Delay in making a complaint may hinder or prevent a proper investigation and resolution of the complaint.
- 1.4. 'Complaints procedures are conducted in a timely and fair manner.' Complainants should normally expect to receive a response to the complaint within 15 days of the member of SPTI staff receiving it.
- 1.5. If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the response at Stage 1 or if for any reason the complainant feels unable to raise the matter under Stage 1 procedures, the Complainant should pursue the matter under the formal procedure outlined in Stage 2 below.

### **2. Stage 2: the Formal Complaints Procedure**

- 2.1 Students wishing to make a formal complaint should address their complaint in writing to their Programme Leader or to the manager in charge of the services, facilities, administrative systems or policies which are the focus of the complaint. (Tutors or administrative staff will advise as to the appropriate person.) Complaints should be as specific and well documented as possible and include the Complainant's name and address, a clear description of the situation giving rise to the complaint, the dates and location of the events described, details of witnesses where appropriate, and any relevant supporting documentation. Any previous unsuccessful attempts at resolution should be detailed and Complainants should state what reasonable steps they believe should be taken to resolve the complaint. Complainants who have felt unable to raise the matter informally under Stage 1 of this procedure should also describe the reasons for not doing so. However, not raising a complaint under Stage 1 will not preclude the matter being investigated at Stage 2.
- 2.2 SPTI 'ensures that appropriate action is taken following an appeal or complaint.' The member of staff in receipt of the complaint (the investigating officer) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint as promptly as practicable but usually within 5 working days.

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- 2.3 The investigating officer will inform the person about whom the complaint has been made that a complaint has been received and clarify the nature of the complaint.
- 2.4 The investigating officer will investigate the complaint and advise the Complainant in writing, normally within 20 working days from the date of the written acknowledgement of the complaint, of the outcome of the investigation.
- 2.5 If the Complainant remains unsatisfied by the outcome, the complainant may request a review of the investigation by writing to the Director of Training within 10 working days of receipt of the outcome of the investigation.
- 2.6 Where such a request is made, the Director of Training will acknowledge receipt of the request within 5 working days and, within 30 working days, review the investigation to establish whether:
  - 2.6.1 The investigating officer has responded to all the substantive areas of the complaint
  - 2.6.2 There was any procedural irregularity in relation to the outcome determined by the investigating officer
  - 2.6.3 New evidence has come to light which was not, with reasonable diligence, available to the complainant at the inception of the formal complaint
- 2.7 Where the Director of Training determines that there are grounds for review, they will review the case on such of the grounds listed above as may apply. The Director of Training shall examine the evidence, call for such papers, examine such witnesses and conduct such other enquiries as they may think fit. The Director of Training shall determine the nature of any subsequent action. The Director of Training may consider that no further action is required in which case their decision is final and will conclude SPTI's procedures.
- 2.8 The Director of Training will advise the complainant in writing, normally within 30 working days from the date of the written acknowledgement of the review request, of the outcome of the review, enclosing a Completion of Procedures letter.
- 2.9 Should no request for review be made within 10 working days from receipt of the letter advising of outcome of the investigation into the complaint, the matter will be considered completed with no further recourse by the student through SPTI's complaints procedure. Where the matter is completed in this way, a Completion of Procedures Letter will not normally be sent unless the student requests this.

SPTI 'monitors and evaluate the effectiveness of our appeals and complaints procedures, and reflect on the outcomes of those procedures for enhancement purposes.'

### **3. Stage 3: Staffordshire University (for degree courses only)**

Students who remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation and who have fully exhausted the SPTI process may pursue their complaint through the awarding body, Staffordshire University. Upon receipt of the complaint, Staffordshire University will contact SPTI to request full details of the complaint. The complaint will be investigated by Staffordshire University under the OIA (The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education) guidelines. Further information can be found at:

<http://www.staffs.ac.uk/legal/policies/complaints-procedure.jsp>

#### **4. Stage 4: The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education**

SPTI and Staffordshire University are members of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's complaints handling scheme. If a complaint has completed all the stages of the SPTI and University's Complaints Procedure, but the complainant remains dissatisfied with the responses of both institutions, they may apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education at the following address:

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education  
Second Floor  
Abbey Gate  
57-75 Kings Road  
Reading  
RG1 3AB  
Tel: 0118 959 9813  
Email: [enquiries@oiahe.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@oiahe.org.uk)

To use this service, the complainant will need a Completion of Procedures letter from Staffordshire University.