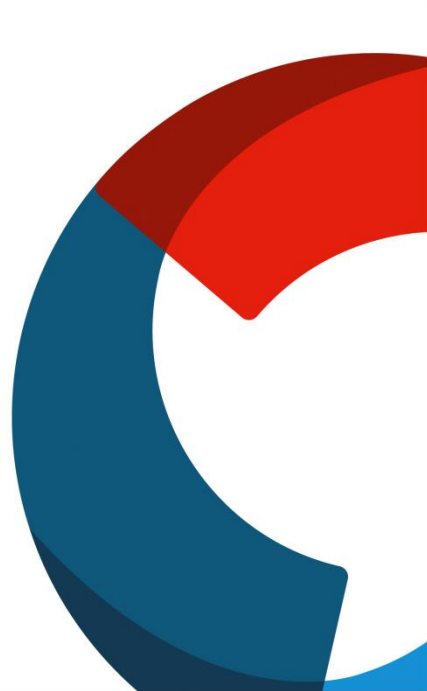


## University of Sussex International Study Centre

### Student Complaints Procedure



## **Introduction**

The ISC seeks at all times to provide the highest level of service. However, there may be occasions when you feel the level of service has not been good enough. The aim of this process is to address the concerns and arrive at an acceptable outcome as quickly as possible. Complaints will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly and where appropriate take swift and effective action to resolve the complaint and prevent any reoccurrence.

- Non-academic complaints usually relate to issues connected with support services but also cover any inappropriate behaviour from Centre staff, including allegations of behaviour which is discriminatory or harassing.
- Academic complaints are on issues relating to the provision of teaching, learning or assessment but not academic judgement on grades or marks

There is a separate process for academic appeals where a student feels that an academic process has not been followed or where there is a grievance on academic grounds such as the outcome of an academic misconduct procedure or mitigating circumstances procedure, or grades awarded for assessments. There is no right to appeal against the academic judgement of examiners This does not include appeals against academic judgement. See the ISC Sussex Appeals procedure.

## **Complaints Procedure**

The complaints procedure has three levels.

### **Level 1**

1. Wherever possible complaints should be raised immediately with the member of staff responsible, or with one of the support services below, with the aim of resolving the problem directly and informally:
  - Your personal tutor, lead personal tutor or subject leader
  - Any of the Student Services team
  - One of your Student Representatives
2. You may also see the Director of Quality and Innovation and may need to meet with the Head of Subject who will help you to resolve the complaint
3. Level 1 will generally be an oral process and a written record will not be made.
4. If you remain dissatisfied with the response to your complaint at Level 1 you should use Level 2 of the process.
5. Please also read the General Principles below

## Level 2

2. Where it has not been possible to resolve matters at Level 1 you should write to the Deputy Centre Director. So that the complaint can be properly investigated you must give as much detail as possible about what has happened. Please include your name and term-time address and any relevant documentation. You should also include what attempts you have already made to resolve the complaint and what you would like the outcome to be.
3. You need to submit a formal Level 2 complaint within three months of the conclusion of the informal Level 1 phase. Complaints received later than this will not normally be considered. You should expect to receive an acknowledgement of the receipt of your complaint within five working days.
4. If the complaint relates to an academic issue your complaint and all relevant documentation, will be forwarded to your Head of Subject
  - Academic complaints are on issues relating to the provision of teaching, learning or assessment
  - Non-academic complaints usually relate to issues connected with support services but also cover any inappropriate behaviour from Centre staff, including allegations of behaviour which is discriminatory or harassing.

If the Head of Subject has already been involved at Level 1, an appropriately senior alternative member of staff will be identified to deal with the Level 2 investigation.

5. In some cases you may be contacted for further information or clarification. You will be able to bring a friend or another person to any meeting to provide you with support. You have the right to request a meeting with the person investigating your complaint, to discuss the issues in person.
6. You will be informed of the result of your complaint in writing and will be provided with the reasons for the outcome. It is our aim to resolve most complaints at Level 2 within 28 calendar days. You will be informed if there is likely to be any delay in the process.
7. Please also read the General Principles below

## Level 3

1. In the event that you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint at Level 2 your complaint can be passed for final internal review to:
  - For academic complaints, the Director of Planning, Governance and Compliance (Academic Secretary) of the University of Sussex
  - For non-academic complaints to the Centre/Regional Director, ISC Sussex
2. You should submit your request for Level 3 review of your complaint within one month of receiving the outcome of the Level 2 investigation. Requests for review received later than this will not normally be considered.

3. Requests to review the outcomes of Level 2 investigations will be considered in terms of whether any of these conditions are met:
  - There were procedural irregularities in the investigation of the complaint; or
  - Fresh evidence can be presented which was not or could not reasonably have been made available to the investigator at Level 2; or
  - The finding of the investigation was against the weight of the evidence.
4. For academic complaints, where the Director of Planning, Governance and Compliance (Academic Secretary) is satisfied that any of the above conditions apply, s/he will undertake a further investigation of the complaint. Where appropriate s/he will consult with Senior Officers, including the Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Registrar & Secretary, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor or the Vice-Chancellor. Where the Director of Planning, Governance and Compliance (Academic Secretary) has been involved in any earlier stage of the complaints process, or in the events to which the complaint relates, s/he will pass the review over to one of the Senior Officers named above.
5. For non-academic complaints where the Centre/Regional Director is satisfied that any of the above conditions apply, s/he will undertake a further investigation of the complaint.
6. The Director will also inform the Director and Principal, ISCs UK and Europe and the Head of Quality, ISCs UK and Europe
7. You will be notified of the outcome of the investigation of the complaint at Level 3 in writing.
8. Please also read the General Principles below

### **Independent Review**

1. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (the OIA) provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints or appeals. When the University's internal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals have been exhausted, the University will issue a Completion of Procedures letter. Students who wish to take up the opportunity of an independent review by the OIA must submit their application to the OIA within three months of the issue of the Completion of Procedures letter. The OIA will not normally consider a complaint which has not previously been considered under all the procedures available within the University, and will not normally consider complaints where the Completion of Procedures Letter is issued more than three years after the substantive event(s) complained about.
2. Further details about the OIA are available from the University of Sussex Academic Office, from the Student Advice Centre, or direct from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.
3. An independent review through the OIA can only be taken up by students for a complaint in respect of the University's procedures and not those of ISC Sussex.

## General Principles

1. Student complaints are normally considered to be complaints from current students at ISC Sussex on course validated by the University of Sussex. However, we will consider a complaint from you under this process if you are a former student and you left the Centre up to six months previously. Otherwise your complaint will be considered under the process for individuals who are not staff or students.
2. As a general principle the Centre expects that complaints will be dealt with informally in the first instance. Many complaints can be dealt with quickly and effectively in this manner without the need to follow formal procedures. This complaints procedure has been designed with this in mind. Advisors in the Centre can advise you on how to deal with your complaint and help to resolve it informally. If you do decide to make a formal complaint, you can get support from:
  - The Student Services team at Friston House
  - One of your Student Representatives
3. If you are dissatisfied about your academic provision on a taught course, we would expect you to raise the matter constructively with your module tutor, personal tutor or subject lead. If still dissatisfied, you should seek to raise the matter with the Director of Quality and Innovation and consider getting assistance in the process from either a local student representative, or one of the student services staff. These would be the kinds of steps that we would expect a student to have taken before submitting a level 2 academic complaint.
4. The Centre is committed to providing a high quality service to its students and you are encouraged to let it know when there is cause for concern or a need for improvement. However, we will not accept complaints which are frivolous (unfounded, trivial) or malicious (with vindictive motivation).
5. You should be assured that you will not be in any way disadvantaged by raising a complaint. We will handle the complaint respecting your privacy and confidentiality except where information including documents has to be shared or discussed progress the complaint.
6. The following list indicates examples of the type of complaint covered by the procedure:
  - Poor teaching or supervision
  - Misleading information in prospectuses or in advertising or promotional material
  - A failing in a Centre or University service, academic or non-academic
  - Inadequate facilities
  - The behaviour of a member of Centre staff
7. It is important to remember that complaints will not always result in the outcome preferred by the complainant. There may be a number of reasons for this, including lack of evidence or circumstances beyond our control which affect the level of service provided
8. The following are not covered by the procedure:

- A request for a review of a decision of an academic body (e.g. Progression Board) regarding student progression, assessment and award. This is defined as an Academic Appeal and is dealt with under the separate Study Group Academic Appeals Procedure.
  - Complaint against another student. These are dealt with under the separate Student Disciplinary Procedures.
9. The Centre reserves the right to decide, in a given case, which internal procedure route (appeals, complaints, disciplinary, etc.) is most suited to respond to the issues presented by a complainant, and not to allow the re-examination of issues that have been appropriately reviewed by one process to also be reviewed by another process
10. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (the OIA) provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints or appeals.

*NB Students do not need to exhaust both the complaints and appeals processes before complaining to the OIA. For example, when a student presents a complaint, there may be clearly-separable aspects that are more relevant to be investigated under the appeals procedures: in which case, both the complaints and appeals procedures may be invoked, and progressed in parallel. In such cases, if a student is not satisfied with the outcome of one process (e.g. complaint), but is awaiting the result of the other process (e.g. an appeal), the student may submit their application to the OIA within three months of receiving the Completion of Procedures letter for the first process to be completed, and does not need to wait until both processes have been completed.*

However, the Centre continues to also reserve the right to decide, in a given case, which internal procedural route (appeals, complaints, disciplinary, etc.) is most suited to handle the issues presented by a complainant, and not to allow the re-examination of issues that are/ have been appropriately reviewed by one process, to also be reviewed by another process in a way that duplicates and does not add specific value.