



# **Student Complaints Procedures**

**September 2023**

**Version 1.0**  
**Approved by the Board of Governors**

# 1. General Principles

- 1.1. The College strives to maintain high standards in its provision of courses, services and facilities to students. The College has established its student complaints procedures to deal with legitimate complaints from students in a fair, prompt and efficient manner, and has adopted and incorporated the standards and guidelines set out in the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)'s *Good practice framework for handling complaints and appeals*.
- 1.2. Vantage encourages resolution of formal complaints in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Any form of retaliation for bringing forward a formal complaint will not be tolerated. The formal complaint process applies to all students and should be followed in all cases when informal resolution is not sufficient to resolve the issue.
- 1.3. Though anonymous formal complaints are permitted, doing so may limit the College's ability to investigate and respond to a formal complaint. Information concerning the nature and scope, evaluation and resolution of formal complaints shall be confidential to the greatest extent possible and will be shared only with those persons who need to know.
- 1.4. Complaints will be addressed through a three stage process.  
  
    Stage I: Early Resolution;  
    Stage II: Formal Complaints Procedure;  
    Stage III: Review Stage
- 1.5. The College aims to resolve all Stage I and II complaints within a period of 90 calendar days from the College being made aware of the issue.
- 1.6. All complaints will be dealt with without recrimination and no student will be disadvantaged on account of raising a complaint. Students may complain individually or collectively, where appropriate. Complaints will be investigated objectively. Anonymous complaints will not be accepted.
- 1.7. Where a complaint made by a student is believed to be frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice, the College reserves the right to take disciplinary action against the student for breach of the Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure. This will be investigated as a potential breach of Section 2.2. (c) of the Code: Respect other members' basic rights to work and live in a safe, secure environment, free from anxiety, fear, intimidation and harassment.
- 1.8. All complaints will be dealt with constructively and the student will be informed of the outcome. Where a complaint is upheld, the College will make an appropriate response including taking any necessary corrective action. Means of redress include an explanation of actions taken or planned and written or oral apologies.
- 1.9. All complaints will be dealt with in confidence with the provision that any person about whom a complaint is made shall be supplied with a copy of the complaint. A student may be asked to attend an interview with the member of staff investigating their complaint.

- 1.10. A record of Stage II and Stage III complaints received from students and the means of resolution will be kept by the Head of Registry and reported annually to the Academic Board as part of the College's monitoring and quality assurance processes.
- 1.11. A student may seek advice from the Student Support Team when making a complaint and may be accompanied by another student or a representative, in any meeting that takes place in connection with a complaint he/she has lodged. However, under no circumstances may the student be represented by an external organisation and professional legal representation.
- 1.12. The College will use information arising from students' complaints to reflect on the quality of the services it provides and to drive continual enhancement of its facilities and learning opportunities. This may include the modification of processes to ensure the issue prompting the complaint does not arise again.

## The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

- 1.13. In addition to the OIA's good practice framework, this policy and procedure has been written with due regard for UK Quality Code and its associated thematic Advice and Guidance on setting processes for dealing with students' concerns, complaints and appeals in a way that is fair, timely and transparent to all parties.

## The Office for the Independent Adjudicator

- 1.14. Vantage College subscribes to the scheme for the independent review of complaints and appeals by Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). Higher education students who believe their complaint has not been properly or fairly handled by the College or the awarding body can request for an independent review to be conducted by the OIA; where such requests are eligible for review, the OIA will investigate in accordance with its rules.
- 1.15. Further information on the OIA' procedures and eligibility for review of a complaint can be found on the OIA's website; [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk), or alternatively students can contact the OIA directly at [enquiries@oiahe.org](mailto:enquiries@oiahe.org)

## 2. Scope of the Complaints Procedure

- 2.1. This procedure is designed to deal with complaints arising from:
  - i) provision of academic services described in the College's publications including teaching, content of courses and support for learning
  - ii) incorrect or misleading information about services provided by the College
  - iii) provision of other College services described in literature published by the College
- 2.2. The student complaints procedure does not cover the following:

- i) any matters relating to examination and assessment procedures or academic appeals which is otherwise dealt with through the Academic Appeals process
- ii) disciplinary issues which are otherwise dealt with through the Student Conduct and Disciplinary Regulations
- iii) admissions procedures prior to enrolment as a student of the College which is otherwise dealt with through the Admissions Policy, Procedure and Regulations
- iv) complaints about the behaviour of other students which are otherwise dealt with through the Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure
- v) unacceptable behaviour of College staff which is otherwise dealt with in paragraph 3.3 below.

- 2.3. If a student wishes to make a complaint about the behaviour of another student or about unacceptable behaviour of College staff, this should be addressed to the Head of Registry in the first instance. The Head of Registry shall consult as appropriate and shall determine the correct student or staff procedure or policy to be followed. Such determination shall be final. The student may seek guidance from the Student Support Team and / or the Principal.
- 2.4. If a complaint has been linked to a particular request (i.e. change of class) the request will not be processed until the complaint has been investigated and closed.

### 3. Complaints Procedure

#### Stage I: Early Resolution

- 3.1. If a student requires advice or wishes to discuss the matter before making a complaint he/she should consult his/her personal tutor, a student representative or the Student Support Team.
- 3.2. The complaint may be made orally or in writing, normally within ten working days of the incident or action from which the complaint arises, or in any event as soon as possible.
- 3.3. Most complaints will be resolved informally by an appropriate member of staff.
- 3.4. The member of staff to whom the complaint is made will investigate or refer the complaint and a response will be made to the student either orally or in writing, normally within ten working days.
- 3.5. If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of this informal procedure, then they should follow the procedures described in the formal complaints procedure below.

## Stage II: Formal complaints procedure

- 3.6. A complaint under this procedure should be made to the Head of Registry, in writing, normally within twenty working days of the incident or action from which the complaint arises, or the outcome of the informal resolution.
- 3.7. The following details must be provided:
- a full statement of the complaint
  - brief details of the steps already taken to resolve the complaint
  - reasons for the student's dissatisfaction with the attempts to resolve the complaint
  - what the student would like to be done
  - what remedy the student is seeking
  - a copy (not original documents) of any documentary evidence the student wishes to submit
  - the student's name and the College student ID number
  - full contact details for the student(including preferred method of contact eg email)
  - whether the student has representation and if so whom
- 3.8. The complaint should be addressed to the "Head of Registry,
- 3.9. The Head of Registry will determine whether all the necessary information has been provided and may contact the student requesting additional details and evidence. In all cases the Head of Registry will acknowledge receipt of the complaint.
- 3.10. The Head of Registry will forward the complaint to the appropriate area(s) who will investigate the complaint using the information provided by the student in their written statement of the complaint. A response will be sent to the student in writing within twenty working days of the full complaint being received by the College. The response sent to the student must be copied to the Head of Registry and all relevant parties.
- 3.11. In instances where it has not been possible to resolve the complaint within 20 working days for a legitimate reason, the relevant area investigating the complaint shall write to the student and inform them of:
- The name of the person investigating their complaint
  - The reason for the delay
  - The date by which the student will be notified of the outcome
  - The letter sent to the student must be copied to the Head of Registry and all relevant parties.
- 3.12. Where the complaint is directly against the Head of Registry or his/her team, then the complaint, as outlined in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.4, should be made direct to the Principal.

## Stage III: Review Stage

- 3.13. If a student has reason to believe that his/her complaint has not been handled fairly, objectively or in accordance with the procedures described above, he/she should write to the Principal within twenty working days of the date of the outcome letter, setting out his/her reasons. On the instruction of the Principal, his/her nominee will act as College Ombudsman and review the handling of the complaint in the light of the student's written statement and report in writing to the Principal within 15 working days. The Principal may confirm or rescind an earlier decision in the light of this report. The Principal will send a written reply to the student within twenty working days of receiving the request for the review of the handling of the complaint.
- 3.14. Dissatisfaction with the outcome of a complaint will not constitute in itself grounds for a review.
- 3.15. Following review, there will be no further opportunity to pursue the complaint internally.

## 4. Other procedures

- 4.1. Should the student raise a complaint that falls within paragraph 3.2 or 3.3 above or should the investigation of any complaints reveal information which appears to show that staff or students have acted in breach of College regulations, the matter will be investigated through the:
  - Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure/Staff Disciplinary Procedure (Employee Handbook); and/or
  - Assessments Regulations and Procedures
- 4.2. This includes, but is not limited to, assault or threatening behaviour, victimisation, sexual harassment or abuse, racist, sexist, homophobic or anti-disabled activity or behaviour; actions likely to cause injury or threaten safety; and unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.
- 4.3. 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 College may not be able to proceed with the case.
- 4.4. Where the complaint results in a hearing under another procedure or policy, the College must comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act. This means that the College may not be able to disclose full details of this procedure and any outcomes to the student. Legally, there is a recognised expectation that internal disciplinary matters of an individual will be private. There is a high expectation of privacy between an employee and employer in respect of disciplinary matters. If the College is unable to disclose the details of the outcome to the student, the student will be informed of the reasons for non-disclosure.

## 5. Prevent Duty:

- 5.1. Under the Prevent duty introduced by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, relevant higher education bodies will need to assess the risks of people being drawn into terrorism and ensure they have plans in place for mitigating these risks. Vantage College is committed to providing a secure environment for all of our students, staff and stakeholders.
- 5.2. It is imperative that our students have a safe place where they can discuss and explore controversial issues safely and in an unbiased way and where our teachers encourage and facilitate this. As a College, we recognise that extremism and exposure to extremist materials and influences can lead to poor outcomes for our students. We also recognise that if we fail to challenge extremist views we are failing to protect our students.
- 5.3. Our College, like all others, is required to identify a Prevent Single Point of Contact (SPOC) who will be the lead within the organisation for safeguarding in relation to protecting individuals from radicalisation and involvement in terrorism. The SPOC at Vantage will be the CEO. If when CEO is unavailable, substitute SPOC will be the Principal. The SPOC will engage with external references.
- 5.4. If any student wants to raise concern regarding extremism, he/she can either download or get the hard copy of 'Vantage Radicalisation and Extremism Concern Form' from student support, fill-in and hand it over to student support officer. If they do not want to reveal their detail, they can post the form to:

The CEO / The Principal

### Notes:

1. In these procedures a working day is any day when the College's offices are normally open. This excludes Sundays and all Bank Holidays and any other designated periods of closure.
2. The member of staff responsible for investigating a complaint at any stage described in the procedure may request the complainant to attend an interview as part of the investigative procedure. The member of staff will agree a date, time and location with the student and confirm this in writing. The complainant has the right to be accompanied by a friend or representative, and must give notification in advance of the meeting of the name of the person who will accompany them at the interview.
3. Any member of staff involved in the complaint who is also to attend the interview must be identified in advance to the complainant. The member of staff may also be accompanied by a representative.

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