

Student Concerns and Complaints Policy

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External reference:	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education's (OIAHE) Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals, Revised December 2022 UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024
Audience:	Students, Staff, and other Stakeholders.

- 1. Introduction..... 2
- 2. Purpose..... 3
- 3. Aims and Objectives..... 3
- 4. Scope..... 3
- 5. Definition 4
- 6. Principles 4
- 7. Confidentiality 5
- 8. Who can make a Student Complaint? 5
- 9. Types of Complaints that can be submitted using this Procedure 6
- 10. Types of Complaints that cannot be submitted using this Procedure..... 7
- 11. Advice and Guidance 7
- 12. Timescales..... 8
- 13. Procedures for Submitting a Complaint..... 8
- 14. Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)..... 12
- 15. Recording, Reporting and Organisational Learning 12

1 Introduction

The College is committed to providing a high-quality educational experience, fully supported by a range of academic and administrative services and facilities.

As part of this partnership between students and staff, the College recognises and respects that students may wish to make a complaint. This policy and its procedures provide full information on how students can make complaints and how the College intends to deal with them in line with the guidelines set down by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The College welcomes the opportunity to correct mistakes, clarify misunderstandings and to respond positively and constructively on any occasion when students feel the need to express dissatisfaction with a particular service provided by the College and its staff.

2 Purpose

The College intends to provide access for students and staff to an effective system for handling students' complaints efficiently and effectively. Implementation of this policy and procedures by the College, should ensure that students feel able to make a complaint, knowing that it will be fairly investigated.

3 Aims and Objectives

The policy aims to ensure that students' complaints at the College are dealt with appropriately. The College has the following objectives in relation to student complaints:

- 3.1 To provide clear information to students on complaint procedures
- 3.2 To ensure students' complaints are dealt with fairly and honestly
- 3.3 To ensure that the complaint handling process helps to improve the student experience

The College aims and objectives are further informed by the principles of Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education's (OIAHE) Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals, December 2022:

- 3.4 Accessible and clear
- 3.5 Fair, independent and confidential
- 3.6 Inclusive
- 3.7 Flexible, proportionate, and timely, and they
- 3.8 Improve the student experience

4 Scope

This policy and procedures focus on student complaints. However, 'student' also refers to anyone who is or was recently a registered student. By 'recently' the College means no more than one academic year before the complaint is submitted. This College will only consider complaints from students who were registered more than one academic year ago at its discretion if the complaint is deemed reasonable. The College extends this policy, within reason, to applicants who are not yet enrolled/registered at the College but may have started the application process.

The policy and procedures, therefore, include applicants and students who wish to enrol, are currently enrolled or have recently been enrolled on any courses provided by the College, whether through blended or distance learning on virtual learning platforms, or in-person at any one of the College's campuses.

5 Definition

For the purpose of this procedure, and in line with the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code for Higher Education (UK Quality Code), a complaint is defined as the: 'expression of a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of a student's learning opportunities.'

6 Principles

The procedure is based on the principles of fairness and transparency and is in keeping with the UK Quality Code, and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education's *Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals*. The procedure is set out to ensure:

- 6.1 Timely resolution of complaints, with an emphasis on local resolution at the earliest opportunity
- 6.2 Processes, decisions, and the reasons behind them are clear and there is opportunity for independent
- 6.3 Review of the way complaints are handled
- 6.4 Students are supported throughout the process

In this spirit, it is anticipated that most student complaints will be resolved as early as possible through informal dialogue between staff and students at a local level and to the satisfaction of all parties.

The College will make reasonable adjustments at any stage of the proceedings to accommodate the needs of students if they require special consideration due to a disability or any other reason.

Students making complaints will not suffer any disadvantage or discrimination because of making a complaint in good faith. However, if a complaint is judged to have been frivolous, vexatious, or malicious, disciplinary action may be taken against the student.

The College expects all parties in a dispute to act professionally, respectfully and within the spirit of its policies and codes of conduct throughout all stages of the Complaints Procedure.

The College will monitor the operation of the Student Complaints Procedures in such a way as to assist in the maintenance and continuous improvement of service standards.

The College does not reimburse expenses related to the processing of a complaint. However, in cases where a complaint is upheld, compensation may be paid in accordance with the Refund and Compensation Policy.

7 Confidentiality

All information gathered throughout the complaint process will be handled in compliance with Article 51 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2018) and the Student Privacy Notice.

Information regarding complainants and individuals against whom complaints are lodged will be treated with sensitivity and kept confidential, except where disclosure is necessary for complaint resolution or mandated by law/public interest.

7.1 Disclosure

By submitting a complaint, students acknowledge that their complaint may be shared with the staff member responsible for investigation, and relevant staff may need access to facilitate investigation or resolution. Individuals subject to complaints have the right to be informed of allegations and evidence against them.

7.2 Sensitive Information

Students are advised to refrain from including unnecessary personal details (e.g., medical conditions) in their complaints unless directly relevant. Disclosure of personal data of others should only occur with their explicit consent.

7.3 Concerns

Should a student have concerns about confidentiality regarding sensitive elements of their complaint, they are encouraged to raise these with the Executive Principal or Managing Director for discussion on minimizing disclosure.

8 Who can make a Student Complaint?

8.1 Eligibility:

The Student Complaints Procedure is open to:

- 8.1.1 Current applicants and enrolled students at OBC.
- 8.1.2 Individuals accepted to study or registered for awards at the College.
- 8.1.3 Those currently on internal employment placements or Alumni within one year of completion.

8.2 Group Complaints:

Where issues affect multiple students, a group complaint may be submitted, provided:

- 8.2.1 Each student demonstrates personal impact.
- 8.2.2 The group nominates a spokesperson, responsible for representing collective views and acting as the primary contact.
- 8.2.3 A written agreement nominating the spokesperson is submitted alongside the complaint.

8.3 Anonymous Complaints:

- 8.3.1 Anonymous complaints are not accepted due to potential hindrance in investigation and communication.
- 8.3.2 Staff receiving anonymous complaints must seek guidance from college leadership on appropriate handling.

8.4 Accompaniment Rights:

Students have the right to be accompanied, supported, or advised by another College community member:

- 8.4.1 Currently enrolled students.
- 8.4.2 College staff.

9 Types of Complaints that can be submitted using this Procedure

9.1 Academic Complaints

Pertaining to alleged inadequacies in the provision of a program of study, tuition, supervision, learning support materials, or other academic-related issues.

9.2 Non-Academic Complaints

Related to alleged inadequacies in services provided by the College, such as failure to provide reasonable adjustments for disabilities or failure to meet contractual or legal obligations.

9.3 Distinction from Academic Appeals

The Academic Appeals Procedure addresses matters concerning student progression, assessment, and awards, providing a separate avenue for review of decisions made by Assessors or Assessment Boards.

9.4 Handling Overlaps

- 9.4.1 Cases may involve elements of both complaints and academic appeals. In such instances, the Chief Academic Officer will determine the appropriate classification, consulting with the student and advising them on the alternative procedure to be followed.
- 9.4.2 Students raising multiple issues not clearly falling under one category will be informed which issues will be considered under each procedure and directed accordingly. This may involve suspending one procedure pending the completion of the other or considering matters together with the student's consent.
- 9.4.3 In cases of significant overlap, the College may opt to conduct a joint investigation if agreed upon by the student. This entails informing the student of the overall investigation's responsibility and the authority issuing the final decision.

10 Types of Complaints that cannot be submitted using this Procedure

The Student Complaints Procedure cannot be used for any of the following matters, for which separate policies and procedures exist:

- 10.1 Complaints by applicants about admissions decisions, where separate Admissions Procedures exist.
- 10.2 Matters relating to assessment of performance and issues of academic judgement, except where there is a complaint about a service provided which needs to be resolved before an academic appeal decision can be made.
- 10.3 Matters relating to Fitness to Practise or Supported Study Procedures, where separate procedures exist.
- 10.4 Complaints which relate to whistleblowing, Freedom of Information or of personal harassment or bullying, where separate procedures exist.

The following includes policies and procedures for the above types of complaints not covered by this policy:

- 10.5 Bullying & Harassment Policy & Procedure.
- 10.6 Academic Appeals Policy & Procedure.
- 10.7 Fitness to Study & Practice Policy.

11 Advice and Guidance

For independent, non-judgemental guidance students may find it helpful to ask the Student Council or a Student Welfare Officer on how to proceed with their intended complaint. If

students have any questions about how the complaints process works, they can contact a member of the Senior Leadership Team at the College such as the Chief Academic Officer, Executive Principle, Chief Operating Officer, or Managing Director.

12 Timescales

12.1 Timely Resolution of Complaints

To facilitate timely investigation and resolution of complaints, students are encouraged to report issues as soon as they arise and attempt to resolve them informally at a local level.

12.2 Deadline for Formal Complaint Submission

If a matter remains unresolved and a formal complaint is desired, it must be raised **no later than three months** after the completion of the academic year in which the complaint originated, **or three months from the date of withdrawal** or commencement of an approved leave of absence from the study program, whichever occurs earlier.

Complaints received after this period will be considered at the discretion of the College, contingent upon valid reasons supported by evidence for the delay.

12.3 Processing Timeline

The College is committed to expeditiously addressing complaints and aims to conclude all stages of the formal complaint process and any associated reviews within **90 calendar days**.

While striving to resolve complaints well before the 90-day deadline, students must adhere to college deadlines for documentation submission and meeting attendance within this time limit.

12.4 Extension of Timelines

Extensions to the 90-calendar day timeline may occur under certain circumstances, such as the complexity or extensive nature of the complaint, submission during periods of key staff absence, or the student's desire to seek legal representation.

In such cases, students will be duly notified and provided with regular updates on the progress of their complaint.

12.5 Definition of 'Working Day'

For the purpose of this policy, a 'working day' is defined as Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays and College closure days.

13 Procedures for Submitting a Complaint

13.1 Stage 1: Informal Immediate Local Resolution

If you have a concern or complaint, email it to: complaints@obc.ac.uk.

Try to talk directly to the staff member who can help you, like your Personal Tutor, Module Leader, or Programme Leader.

If needed, the College can arrange for a neutral person to help sort out the issue (mediation).

Expect a response within **5 working days**.

Mediation:

13.1.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved satisfactorily through the normal procedure, mediation may be arranged.

13.1.2 Mediation is voluntary and will only take place with the agreement of both parties.

13.1.3 The Chief Academic Officer, Executive Principal or Managing Director will be responsible for arranging mediation.

13.1.4 The mediator will be neutral to the dispute.

13.2 Stage 2: Formal Complaint Resolution

If your issue is not resolved through informal means, please complete the Complaints Form (Appendix 1) available on the College website and send it via email to: complaints@obc.ac.uk.

Clearly articulate your concerns, detail any informal steps you have taken to address them, and specify the resolution you seek. You will receive an acknowledgment email within **3 working days**.

Upon receipt, a designated **Student Complaints Manager**, who has had no previous involvement in the subject matter of the complaint. A Complaint Manager will normally be a Programme Leader, Chief Academic Officer, or other senior employee of the College. The Complaint Manager will appoint an Investigating Officer as soon as possible and within **5 working days**. The Investigating Officer will carry out an investigation into the complaint thoroughly and make recommendations within one month. You will receive a written response from the College, detailing the investigation's outcome.

The Investigating Officer uses the Complaint Investigation Form (Appendix 3) to document and manage the investigation process. This form includes sections for:

13.2.1 **Allegation/Issue:** Description of the complaint or issue.

13.2.2 **Type of Investigation:** The nature of the investigation (e.g., Disciplinary, Grievance).

13.2.3 **Persons Involved:** Names of individuals subject to the investigation and the complainant.

13.2.4 **Investigator(s):** Names of those conducting the investigation.

Investigation Details:

- 13.2.5 Background: How the issue was identified and any prior actions taken.
- 13.2.6 Remit of Investigation: Specific allegations or concerns being investigated.
- 13.2.7 Investigation Process: Methods used to gather information, including interviews and document reviews.
- 13.2.8 Witnesses: List of individuals interviewed during the investigation.
- 13.2.9 Findings: Summary of findings for each allegation, with references to supporting documentation.
- 13.2.10 Conclusions: Overall assessment based on evidence, including recommendations for further action if necessary.
- 13.2.11 Appendices: Supplementary materials such as witness statements, interview notes, and event chronologies.
- 13.2.12 The investigating officer will sign and date the form upon completion.

13.3 Stage 3: Formal Complaint Review

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of Step 2, you may request a review by the Student Complaints Review Panel. To do this, you must write to the **Registrar within 10 working days** of receiving the outcome of Step 2, clearly explaining the reasons for your continued dissatisfaction.

The Registrar will contact you to arrange a review by the Student Complaints Review Panel, which will consist of college employees who have not been previously involved in your complaint. You will have the opportunity to attend a hearing and may bring a companion for support if you wish.

13.4 Consideration by the Student Complaints Review Panel

13.4.1 Panel Composition:

The Student Complaints Review Panel shall consist of five members, including the Chair, to ensure fair and thorough consideration of complaints.

Fairness:

Both the student raising the complaint and the College staff involved shall typically attend the hearing simultaneously to ensure transparency and fairness. However, the student has the option to request separate attendance if preferred.

13.4.2 Virtual Attendance:

Students may attend the Panel virtually, if necessary, arrangements for which shall be made in advance.

13.4.3 Initial Briefing:

Before the commencement of the hearing, the Chair shall provide the Panel with an initial briefing to ensure clarity and understanding of the case at hand.

13.4.4 Presenting the Case:

The student presenting the complaint shall have the opportunity to present their case and respond to any questions posed by the Panel. Subsequently, College representatives shall provide their response, also addressing queries raised.

13.4.5 Additional Witnesses:

The Panel reserves the right to call upon additional staff or students who may contribute pertinent information to aid in the decision-making process.

13.4.6 Minutes:

Detailed minutes of the proceedings shall be recorded by an impartial staff member. At the conclusion of the hearing, all attendees, including the student and College representatives, shall review and sign the minutes. Any discrepancies shall be resolved and agreed upon before finalization.

13.4.7 Decision:

Following deliberation, the Panel shall determine whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld, or dismissed. In cases requiring further consideration, the Panel may reconvene later.

13.4.8 Confidentiality:

Discussions within the Panel shall remain confidential, ensuring the privacy of all involved parties. Decisions shall be reached through a confidential ballot, if necessary, with the Chair holding the deciding vote in the event of a tie.

13.4.9 Outcome Communication:

The decision reached by the Panel shall be communicated to the student and relevant stakeholders within 5 working days, typically via email. In the event of any delays, the student shall be promptly notified.

13.5 Awarding Body Appeals and Referrals to the OIA

Where a student remains dissatisfied with the outcome after the College internal complaints procedures above have been concluded, they may have recourse to request a review of the decision by their course's awarding body.

However, for University of West London, (<https://www.uwl.ac.uk/about-us/policies-and-regulations/appeals-regulations>) the link provides detailed guidance.

Any students studying Ravensbourne programme and wants to approach University directly can reach out to the provided link (<https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/about-us/governance/appeals-policy-and-procedure>).

The Student Support staff will assist the student in the correct procedures for escalating a complaint to the awarding body for additional review; the awarding body will investigate the matter in accordance with its policies and procedures.

Any further actions arising from the awarding body's consideration of the complaint will be

agreed between the College 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 College and the awarding body's final decisions.

13.6 Stage 3 Formal Complaint Review for BNU Students

Students enrolled in courses in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) have a distinct process for the review stage of their complaints. This section outlines the procedure BNU students should follow if they remain dissatisfied after the conclusion of the OBC complaint process.

For a comprehensive understanding of this process and the necessary steps to follow, students are advised to refer to BNU's official guidance on resolving problems: [BNU Student Complaints Procedure](#).

Guidance for Addressing Complaints:

BNU students should address their complaints in accordance with the guidance provided in the link. It is essential for students to familiarize themselves with BNU's specific requirements and procedures to ensure their concerns are appropriately addressed.

Further Assistance:

If BNU students require further clarification or assistance regarding the Stage 3 - Review process, they are encouraged to contact the relevant department or representative at BNU directly.

14 Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

If a student has completed the College's internal Student Complaints Procedure and they remain dissatisfied with the outcome, they may be able to forward their complaint for review to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), providing that it is eligible under the OIA's Rules.

Where a student has exhausted the College's internal complaints procedure, they will be issued a Completion of Procedures letter by the College (please see Appendix 2). If a student chooses to refer their complaint to the OIA for review, they must do so in writing to the OIA within 12 months of the receipt of their Completion of Procedures letter, using the Scheme Application form. The procedures and the form can be accessed from the OIA's website: <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>.

15 Recording, Reporting and Organisational Learning

The College will record student complaints in sufficient, proportionate detail for analysis and management reporting to allow the causes of complaints to be identified, addressed and,

where appropriate, for training opportunities and improvements to be introduced.

On an annual basis, an anonymised report on the number and nature of formal student complaints considered and their outcomes will be presented to the Academic Board. An anonymised annual summary report of Stage 2 complaints will also be considered. This process will ensure appropriate monitoring of all complaints and related outcomes and is intended to facilitate learning from complaints.

The College will keep and dispose of records relating to student complaints in accordance with its Data Privacy Notice.

Appendix 1: Student Complaints Form

Oxford Business College
STUDENT COMPLAINT FORM

Who can use this form?

Any student applying to or enrolled on programmes of study at the College, inclusive of recently registered students for complaints concerning pre-graduation grievances. A complaint submitted by a third party will not be accepted unless accompanied by written authorization from a student. Anonymous complaints will not be accepted.

What is this form for?

This form is used to submit a formal complaint about a service you have received from Oxford Business College. (Complaints can also be raised informally if you would prefer to take this course of action. If you have already raised an informal complaint and you are unhappy with the way your complaint has been handled informally, or if you do not feel that informal resolution is appropriate, please complete this form.)

Regardless of any other representation, complaints only become formal when a fully completed Complaint Form has been received.

Complainants are advised to exercise caution regarding the use of language and avoid personal abuse as anything appearing in this form will be disclosed as the subject of the complaint during any investigation.

Where to submit the form

When you have completed, signed, and dated the form, please email the completed form to complaints@obc.ac.uk attaching any documentation that you wish to use to support your claim.

What will happen next?

Once you have submitted this form, the following process will take place:

- An Investigating Officer will be appointed within **5 working days** of receipt of the Complaint Form.
- You will be asked to meet with the Investigating Officer to discuss your complaint.
- You will receive a written outcome within **20 days** of raising your formal complaint.

The College will have due regard towards maintaining confidentiality in relation to your complaint but, to enable it to be considered fully, the content will need to be disclosed to members of staff involved in the investigation of your complaint. Please note that by signing the Declaration you consent to the disclosure and sharing of information relevant to your

complaint within the College at all stages.

SECTION A – YOUR DETAILS

Title:
Forename (s):
Family Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Email:
Contact telephone number:
Programme of Study:
Student Registration Number:
Date of the event about which you are complaining:

SECTION B – NATURE OF THE COMPLAINT

Please set out the reason(s) why the complaint is being made and specify:

- who or what is being complained about;
- the events that took place in chronological order; and

- the consequences that you believe you have suffered as a result.

Please use additional sheets if necessary – please ensure your name and student number is on all additional sheets.

NB Should you wish to provide additional supporting documents, please attach them with this form.

SECTION C – AN OUTLINE OF THE ACTION YOU HAVE TAKEN SO FAR

If you have already taken steps to resolve your complaint *informally*, please outline them below.
(If you have not taken these steps, please proceed to Section D).

Have you tried to resolve this complaint informally?	YES / NO
Please provide details of attempts to resolve informally including names of people contacted, daters contacted, etc. These people may be contacted in the course of any investigation.	
Why do you remain dissatisfied with the response to your Stage 1 Complaint?	

Give details of anyone else who is acting on your behalf who you consent to us liaising with.

SECTION D – DESIRED OUTCOME

Please say what action you would like taken and any suggestion for resolution or redress to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction.

SECTION E – DECLARATION

As far as possible, all complaints will remain confidential to those people who are involved in investigating the complaint, providing a response to it, and communicating with you, unless there is a serious risk of harm to you or others. In the interest of natural justice, parties to a complaint have the right to know the full details of the complaint.

I, _____ declare that to the best of my knowledge all of the information I have supplied is true, accurate and complete.

SIGNED: DATE:

PRINT NAME:

PLEASE LIST any correspondence or other documentation related to your complaint which you have attached with this complaint form.

15.1 Appendix 2: Completion of Procedures (COP) Letter Template

Dear *[Name of complainant]*,

Completion of Procedures Letter

This letter confirms that the internal procedures of Oxford Business College in relation to your *complaint / appeal etc** regarding *[please describe]* have been completed.

The issues that you raised in your *complaint / appeal etc* were* *[details]*

The issue(s) that were considered in relation to your *complaint / appeal etc was / were**: *[summary of the complaint etc]*.

The final decision of Oxford Business College is* *[detail]* because *[reasons]*.

The procedures / regulations applied were*: *[details and date as supplied to the OIA's electronic Regulations Bank]*.

Oxford Business College subscribes to the independent scheme for the review of student complaints. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you may be able to apply for a review of *your complaint / appeal etc** to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provided that the complaint you take to the OIA is eligible under its rules.

Should you decide to make a complaint to the OIA, your OIA Complaint Form **must be received by the OIA** within **12 months** of the date of this letter, that is, it must be received by the OIA **on or before** *[insert date - e.g. if the Completion of Procedures Letter is dated 9 July 2021, this date should be 9 July 2022]*.

[Include here any factors of which the College is aware which mean that it is particularly important for the student to bring the complaint promptly.]

You can fill in the OIA's complaint form online or download a copy from the OIA website. <http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx>. The OIA also publishes *An Introduction to the OIA Scheme for Students*, which can be downloaded from the website [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education - OIAHE](http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx). Alternatively, you can telephone or write to the OIA for a form. **You should send a copy of this letter to the OIA with your OIA Complaint Form.**

Guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can also be found on the OIA's website [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education - OIAHE](http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx)

Please note that the OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with through the provider's internal procedures.

Yours sincerely,

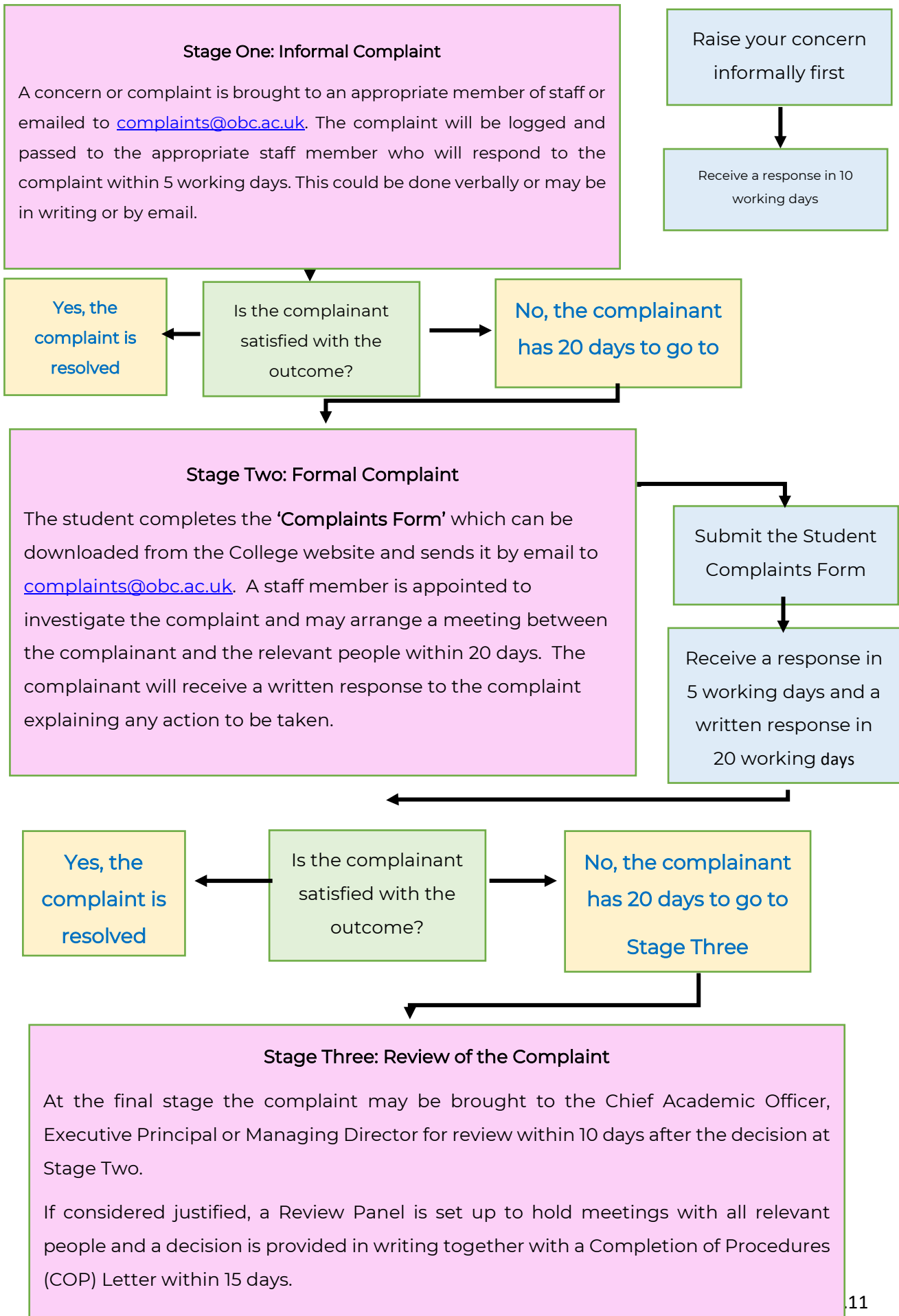
Chief Academic Officer

15.2 Appendix 3: Complaint Investigation Form

Allegation/Issue	
Type of Investigation e.g. Disciplinary/Grievance etc	
Name(s) of persons subject to investigation	
Name of complainant (If appropriate)	
Investigator(s)	
Background	
This may cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did the issue become known?• Have any other actions been taken prior to the investigation?	
Remit Of the Investigation	
This may cover: What specific allegations/concerns (by bullet points) were investigated?	
Investigation Process	
This may cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A brief description of method(s) used to gather information• A record of what interviews/statements were undertaken, and documents reviewed	
Witnesses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• List of witnesses interviewed	
Findings	
This should cover: A summary of findings and observations for each specific allegation/issue of concern investigated, cross-referencing any documentation where needed	
Conclusions	
This may cover: For each concern/allegation investigated an overall opinion based 'on the balance of probabilities' on whether there is evidence to support allegations made. Recommendations on whether further actions under the relevant complaint's procedure should be taken.	
Appendices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These should be attached and may include witness statements, investigatory interview notes, chronology of events etc.	

Signed by Investigating Officer	
Date	

Appendix 4: Flow Chart of Complaints Procedure and Time Frames





Written response and Completion of Procedures Letter provided in 20 days.



Submit a review request.
Receive a response in 5 days. A Review Panel set up in 10 days.



If the complainant is still unsatisfied with the outcome, they may contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) within 12 months of receiving the COP. At any time, a student may also contact a relevant external partner or awarding body.