

College Policy for Suggestions and Complaints

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Christ's College welcomes comments and suggestions about the services that it provides, and junior members are encouraged to communicate any causes for concern, either academic or non-academic. For matters which cannot otherwise be resolved, the College has a formal *Complaints Procedure*. However, students should where possible first raise their concerns informally with the senior member or member of staff directly involved, or by contacting the person in charge of the relevant area. If in doubt, or where it seems appropriate, students should contact any Tutor.
- 1.2 The following guide to informal procedures may be helpful. Students are usually expected to raise concerns about individual supervisors with their Director of Studies, and/or with a Tutor. Routine non-academic concerns, which would include comments about individual accommodation or a question about a College bill, may be expressed to the Domestic Bursar or the Bursar either in person or through a Tutor, and can generally be resolved quickly. Issues of common concern, and which affect the student body as a whole, may also be raised through the student representatives on the Undergraduate or Graduate Liaison Committees. All such representations will be taken seriously; many complaints can be dealt with quickly and effectively in this manner, without recourse to formal procedure.
- 1.3 In considering whether to raise a complaint about an aspect of the College's educational provision, students should be aware that some areas are already served by specific procedures. These include:
 - (a) College Discipline – details of informal and formal hearings, punishments, and appeals procedures are contained in the College's Rules and Regulations, copies of which are available from the Senior Tutor's Office.
 - (b) Racial or sexual harassment, for which the College has a separate Code of Practice (see elsewhere in this booklet).
 - (c) Examination Appeals – separate procedures exist for appealing to the University in a case where the student feels that he or she has been disadvantaged or unfairly classified in a University examination, whether through illness or for any other reason. The present procedure is for a Tutor to make an appeal on a student's behalf to the University via the Secretary of the Board of Examinations. The College has also established its own procedure for dealing with cases of examination failure (see elsewhere in this booklet).
- 1.4 The *Complaints Procedure* which follows is for those more serious complaints which fall beyond the scope of those outlined above in 1.2 and 1.3. These are perhaps most likely to concern matters relating to the educational provision of the College, or could relate to the conduct of senior members or the academic staff of the College in failing properly to discharge their responsibilities to a student or students. The College wishes 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 any other sources of bias. Before making use of these

procedures, however, the College expects that all normal and informal channels for expressing student grievances will have been exhausted. So the matter should first have been raised with a Tutor or the Senior Tutor, or the relevant Directors of Studies, for academic matters, or with a Tutor or the Domestic Bursar or Bursar for complaints against College staff. Also, in raising possible issues of complaint, junior members need to be aware of and observe their obligations as members of the College and the University. In particular they have a responsibility not to waste resources on frivolous or vexatious complaints.

- 1.5 The complaints procedure is confidential, except where the complaint must necessarily be disclosed to another person or body in order that it may be investigated in which case the student will be notified in advance that the disclosure is to be made. Students will not be prejudiced in any way by lodging a *bona fide* complaint.
- 1.6 The College will aim to ensure that any complaint is investigated thoroughly and swiftly and, where it is concluded that remedial action is required, that it is implemented without undue delay.
- 1.7 Any student who is considering bringing forward a complaint under the formal procedure detailed in section 2 below may wish first to seek advice from any Tutor or Fellow of the College, from a member of the College Students Union Executive Committee or Graduate Students Committee, or from other relevant sources.
- 1.8 A complaint may only be raised under the formal procedure detailed below by a matriculated undergraduate or postgraduate student member of Christ's College who is either resident or who is temporarily absent with permission to intermit their course or to work away from Cambridge. The complaint must be raised by the student or students concerned and not by relatives or friends or other third-parties.

2 *Formal Complaint Procedure*

- 2.1 A complaint should initially be raised informally, in the manner outlined in 1.1 above. If this has not produced a satisfactory resolution, the student should write to the *Complaints Officer*, with a full statement of the complaint. (Written correspondence should not be entered into with the person who is the subject of the complaint.) The Senior Tutor will normally act as Complaints Officer, except where the complaint specifically involves the Senior Tutor; in such a case the Master should be informed in writing, and will appoint a Fellow of the College to act as Complaints Officer.
- 2.2 The Complaints Officer will acknowledge receipt and aim to see or otherwise contact the complainant, where possible within 10 days of receiving the complaint, in order to discuss the issues and decide the best way to proceed. If the student so wishes, the Complaints Officer will proceed on the basis of written evidence.
- 2.3 The Complaints Officer may vary procedures and may invite other persons to be present at any meeting whenever he or she considers that would be appropriate.
- 2.4 The student may choose to be accompanied by a nominated companion from among the College's membership, either junior or senior, at the initial meeting with the Complaints Officer and at any subsequent meeting. The same companion should attend all relevant meetings, and will have the right to speak.

- 2.5 At all stages the Complaints Officer will endeavour to resolve the complaint informally. Should informal resolution prove impossible or inappropriate he or she will formally resolve the complaint.
- 2.6 At the initial meeting the Complaints Officer will discuss with the student whether he or she wishes to proceed with a formal complaint. If so, the Complaints Officer will:
- (a) Notify the student that he or she will investigate the complaint.
 - (b) Inform the student of what steps are to be taken to investigate the complaint.
 - (c) Inform the student of any other person whom he or she intends to notify about the complaint. (See 1.5 above.)
 - (d) Discuss the time-scale for investigating the complaint.
 - (e) Discuss the nature of the remedy the student is seeking.
- 2.7 The Complaints Officer will aim to investigate the complaint and notify the student of the results within 14 days of the first meeting with the student. In the event this is not possible, the Complaints Officer will inform the student of the reason for the delay.
- 2.8 After concluding the investigation, the Complaints Officer will notify the student in writing of the decision, with reasons, and may arrange a meeting at which the student will be notified of the decision, and of any action the College proposes to take.
- 2.9 The Complaints Officer may reject a complaint on the grounds that it is frivolous, vexatious, or has been proceeded with too slowly or is too late.
- 2.10 In general the power of the Complaints Officer is limited to making recommendations to the appropriate person or College body authorised to take appropriate action. Where a complaint is upheld, remedies may include one or more of the following:
- (a) A request for a written and/or verbal apology;
 - (b) A recommendation for a change in College practice or policy;
 - (c) Financial compensation within limits determined by the College Council, or a recommendation that the Council consider more generous compensation;
 - (d) A recommendation that disciplinary or other appropriate action be initiated against students, staff or Fellows.

It should be noted that the College's action may be limited in cases where the person subject to the complaint is not a member or employee of the College.

The Complaints Officer may also decide that a student shall recover reasonable expenses incurred in pursuing the complaint.

- 2.11 A complaint must normally be made within 3 months of the matters about which the complaint is made.
- 2.12 In the event that the complainant or the person subject to the complaint (where a member or an employee of the College) is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, he or she may appeal within 14 days of receipt of the decision to the Appeals Committee.

3 *Appeals*

- 3.1 An Appeals Committee shall be established consisting of three members selected by the Master from a panel of nine appointed for the academic year by the College Governing Body. No member of the Appeals Committee shall have any interest in or previous involvement with the issue or complaint.
- 3.2 When receiving notice of an appeal the Complaints Officer will:
- (a) Call a meeting of the Appeals Committee, to be held, whenever possible, within 14 days.
 - (b) Provide a written statement of the essential facts of the case and justifying the decision and/or recommendations, and including copies of any written submissions made by the student concerned and others directly involved.
 - (c) Inform both the student and the person or persons subject to the complaint of the date and time of the meeting and of their rights to submit new evidence and to be accompanied to the meeting.
- 3.3 The Appeals Committee shall be chaired by its most senior member and shall determine its own procedure, provided that both the complainant and the person subject to the complaint shall each be allowed a full and fair opportunity to make representations and to comment on any relevant evidence. The Committee shall form its own judgement of the merits of the complaint after full and careful review of all available evidence and in the light of the representations made by the parties.
- The Complaints Officer will normally only be present at the meeting of the Appeals Committee if he or she is so requested by the Chairman.
- 3.4 The Appeals Committee shall have the power to confirm, amend or rescind the original decision and shall have the same powers of decision and recommendation as are allowed to the Complaints Officer (see 2.9 and 2.10 above).
- 3.5 If the complainant or the person subject to the complaint (where a member or an employee of the College) is not satisfied with the decision of the Appeals Committee, the complaint should be put in writing within 7 days to the Master, who will review the case at his or her discretion.
- 3.6 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the procedure, it may be open to him or her to refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (www.oiahe.org.uk). Advice on the appropriate procedures may be obtained from the Master.

4 *Monitoring and review*

- 4.1 The Complaints Officer shall keep a record of all complaints and the procedure followed in dealing with the complaint, the time taken to resolve the complaint, and the outcome of the complaint.
- 4.2 The Complaints Officer may report to a meeting of the Governing Body in outline on any complaint received, though in all cases observing the principle of confidentiality outlined in 1.5.

4.3 The Governing Body, including its student representative members, shall from time to time review:

- (a) The adequacy of information, advice, guidance and support for students on making complaints;
- (b) The adequacy of understanding amongst Fellows, staff and students of the grounds on which a complaint might arise;
- (c) Action which may usefully be taken to prevent the recurrence of any situation which led to a successful complaint.