

CECOS COLLEGE Complaints Policy and Procedure

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1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. CECOS College London (CECOS) is committed to delivering high quality teaching and learning and we therefore encourage our students, staff and other stakeholders to give us feedback. We believe that it is especially important for our students to be able to express their concerns and ideas for improvement. Students may do this via a variety of means, including via our Complaints Procedure. The Procedure is aligned with the Expectations for Quality and Standards of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education area covering Concerns, Complaints and Appeals and the associated principles of fairness and transparency.

The aim of the Complaints Policy is to ensure that:

- a. Students, staff and other stakeholders can raise any concerns, on academic and/or non-academic matter(s), excluding review of assessment decisions.
- b. The concern is dealt with promptly and effectively by a senior officer of the College.
- c. Feedback from complaints is an important source which is used in the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.
- d. The complaints are considered as opportunities for engaging with students and obtaining individual and/or collective feedback on academic and non-academic matters.

CECOS is committed to managing complaints in a way that:

- Is timely and efficient, to facilitate a speedy resolution;
- Is fair and transparent to all parties;
- Promotes informal conciliation such as mediation, where appropriate;
- Promotes feedback and best practice to inform academic and administrative teams and enhance the student experience.

The Complaints Policy and Procedure applies to:

- Students who are registered with CECOS at the time of making the complaint.
- Staff who work for CECOS College or have an official link to the College.
- Visitors, employers or other stakeholders who have contact and business with CECOS College.
- Former students who ceased to be registered with the College within 30 working days.
- A number of students who have a common complaint. Students may make a collective complaint provided that one student identifies him/herself to act as a spoke person.
- Where a third party makes a complaint on behalf of a student, the student's consent will be required in writing. All correspondence will be sent to the student as well as their representative unless otherwise agreed.
- Anonymous complaints are not normally encouraged other than in the case of harassment and sexual misconduct. Complaints in other cases should include evidence-based reasons for making the complaint anonymously. Raising a concern anonymously could delay investigation and communication of the outcome.

- 1.2. This procedure covers all aspects of a student's experience at CECOS **except for the following, for which separate procedures exist:**

- All academic matters relating to examination and assessment performance and outcomes are managed via an Academic Appeals process (the exact procedure students must follow may vary depending on the programme's official awarding body. Students should therefore consult their programme handbooks or administration teams for further information).
- Disciplinary issues are covered by the Disciplinary Procedures for Students.
- Racial, sexual and other forms of harassment are covered by the Anti-Bullying and Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy.
- The approval and payment of refunds, which is handled by a different procedure; any persons seeking a refund should contact the administration team at the College.

1.3. We aim to resolve all formal complaints within **10 working days** whenever possible and without prejudice to the complainant. Where this is not possible, the complainant will receive an acknowledgement and will be kept up to date.

2. Definition

2.1. For the purposes of these procedures, a **complaint** is defined as a written expression of concern about the provision of a course or programme of study or a related aspect of service or a facility offered by CECOS College.

2.2. Grounds for a complaint might include the following:

- Dissatisfaction with standards of academic provision, for example, insufficient or ill-maintained resources and facilities, arrangements for assessment, academic feedback, or information provided, or not provided, about a course;
- Dissatisfaction with the quality or frequency of supervision or tuition, compared with previously advertised levels;
- Deficiencies in standards of service, for example, support facilities such as administrative services;
- Misinformation about an academic programme;
- Dissatisfaction with the level and availability of pastoral support;
- Other deficiencies in the quality of the learning experience and services;
- The inappropriate behaviour of a member of staff including abuse of power;
- Harassment and sexual misconduct.

2.3. The procedure does **not** allow for a complaint to be raised about an academic assessment decision, for example an examination or assessment result. All academic appeals are subject to the appropriate appeals procedure, as specified by the award's validating partner institution.

2.4. The procedure does **not** allow for complaints by one student against another. Such complaints are the subject of separate disciplinary regulations published in the CECOS Disciplinary Procedure.

- 2.5. Students or other stakeholders who require assistance submitting a formal complaint may seek help from a programme coordinator or from the student welfare officer.

3. General Principles

- 3.1. It is important that students and other stakeholders, prior to engaging with the Complaints Procedure, have a clear understanding of what the procedure is, what it entails and possible (as well as impossible) outcomes.
- 3.2. All complaints are taken seriously and no individual will be penalised for making a genuine complaint. CECOS expects that students, staff and other stakeholders will not engage in frivolous or vexatious complaints. However, where clear evidence exists that complaints have been submitted which are clearly baseless, frivolous or vexatious, action may be taken under the Student or Staff Disciplinary Procedures.
- 3.3. CECOS aims to ensure that the procedure to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved, with mediation and informal resolution an option at any point. Complaints will be handled sensitively, courteously and confidentially. All complaints will be dealt with as quickly as possible to avoid issues becoming protracted. However, patience and understanding is urged from all parties when complex issues or complaints involving multiple parties may require longer investigating and resolving.
- 3.4. The complaints procedure operates on the principles of natural justice:
- There are (at least) two sides to every dispute;
 - All parties are given the opportunity to provide evidence to substantiate their version of the issue / incident;
 - Full disclosure of any allegations or evidence will be made to those parties involved in the complaint;
 - All parties involved in a complaint have the right to be accompanied by a friend or advocate, or non-legal representative at each stage of the procedure;
 - It is assumed that all parties operate in good faith and provide information which is true, complete and not misleading; this includes a duty to disclose all information which is relevant to the issue at stake, including information which may not support their position.
- 3.5. All information provided regarding a complaint will remain confidential for use within the complaints process and is subject to the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Only staff directly involved with the complaint will be given access to confidential information.
- 3.6. Anonymous or third party complaints will only be accepted for incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct incidents. No investigation of a complaint made on behalf of a student, member of staff or other stakeholder will be undertaken without the individual's written

agreement to the concerns raised and their written consent for an investigation to be carried out. This includes complaints made by the parent or spouse of the stakeholder concerned.

- 3.7. No student, staff member or stakeholder bringing a complaint under this procedure, whether successfully or otherwise will be treated less favourably by any member of staff than if the complaint had not been brought.
- 3.8. CECOS will endeavour to address and resolve all complaints within 10 working days. Certain complex cases may however take a longer time to resolve than other cases. In such instances the complainant will be kept informed of the progression of their case and CECOS will attempt to give an indication of when the matter will be resolved.
- 3.9. For complaints linked to Harassment and Sexual Misconduct please refer to the CECOS Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Condition E6 Policy and the Procedures for Handling Cases of Harassment or Sexual Misconduct raised by students: www.cec.ac.uk/harassment

4. CECOS's Three-Stage Complaints Procedure

- 4.1. CECOS has a three-stage internal student complaints procedure with additional recourse to external review by award validating partners. Some programmes are eligible for review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (*Section 5*).
- 4.2. Any complaints that are escalated before the earlier stages of the complaints procedure have been used will be reverted back to the appropriate stage unless there is a strong reason for the escalation.

Stage 1 – Informal / Local Resolution

- 4.3. When first making a complaint, students, staff or other stakeholders should, in the first instance, raise the issue informally with a member of CECOS staff; this may initially be with an academic member such as the Tutor, Module or Programme Leader or with a member of the programme administration and support team or an administration officer. Investigations into complaints will be led by the Director of Operations who will attempt to meet with the involved parties where appropriate, and to find a solution acceptable to all parties.
- 4.4. All complaints should normally be made within **21 days** of the alleged incident, matter or concern but must be **within 30 days**.
- 4.5. When an informal complaint is raised with an administrator or member of the student services team, these staff may need to refer the complaint to a more senior member of the team or to the Director of Operations. The complainant will be informed that their complaint is being raised with Management and made aware that the staff member will get back to them within a given time frame.

- 4.6. Students and staff should keep a record of any action taken to resolve the complaint and keep copies of any relevant correspondence.
- 4.7. A complainant should normally expect to receive a written or email acknowledgement of their complaint within **2 working days** and a full response, via email or in writing, within **10 working days**. This timescale may need to be extended during holiday periods or when the complaint is complex or involves multiple parties.
- 4.8. If it is not possible to resolve a complaint informally, then the complainant will be advised that they can submit a complaint under Stage 2 of the CECOS College Complaints procedure.

Stage 2 - Formal Procedure:

- 4.9. Where the complaint has not been resolved or satisfactorily dealt at an informal level, then a student or stakeholder can submit a formal complaint. Students or staff will be expected to provide details of their attempt to resolve the matter locally, or a suitable reason as to why local resolution is not possible.

Submitting a Formal Complaint:

- 4.10. Formal complaints should be sent via email to the Director of Operations.
- 4.11. Where necessary complainants should provide appropriate evidence to support any allegations they make (evidence may include signed witness statements, letters, emails and any other relevant information). Where a complainant fails to provide reasonable evidence to substantiate their allegations, CECOS reserves the right not to progress the complaint further if it is reasonably believed that a *prima facie* case was not established.
- 4.12. If a formal complaint is submitted outside the advertised deadlines, without good cause or reason, then the complaint will be deemed out of time and CECOS reserves the right not to progress the complaint, unless it would be inequitable to do so.
- 4.13. A complainant should normally expect to receive a written or email acknowledgement from the College within **2 working days** and a full response, via email or in writing, within 10 working days. This timescale may need to be extended during holiday periods or when the complaint is complex or involves multiple parties.

Resolution of Formal Complaints

- 4.14. In addition to informing continuous quality enhancement, the aim of this policy is to provide resolutions. Accordingly, while general expressions of concern are welcome, students staff or other stakeholders are encouraged to specify the remedy they seek and/or the desired outcome to their complaint.

- 4.15. There are a number of ways in which the complaint may be progressed at this stage, depending upon the nature of the complaint. Complainants will be notified of this in writing. Such action may include:
- A meeting with a designated senior officer (often the Principal) to clarify matters of procedure;
 - Forwarding the complaint to a named person in the relevant department who will investigate the matter locally and provide a written response to the complaint;
 - Mediation facilitated by a non-involved member of staff.
- 4.16. Where the complaint is complex and / or contains serious allegations against staff, the designated senior officer will either:
- Appoint an independent Investigating officer to investigate the circumstances of the complaint; or
 - Arrange a Formal Hearing of the complaint.
- 4.17. Notwithstanding the above, the complainant may formally request that the case be taken to mediation at any point in the proceedings up to the convening of a Complaints Committee meeting. (Stage 3, below).
- 4.18. Wherever possible CECOS will seek to facilitate an early resolution of the complaint. CECOS aims to provide a resolution within **10 working days** of submission of the formal complaint. Should this not be possible (due to complexity or requests for information from other parties), complainants will be kept informed of any likely delay and the reasons for the delay, at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.19. A written notification of the outcome of the complaint will be sent by the Director of Operations or other designated member of staff. This will include whether the complaint is upheld or not and any further action to be taken.
- 4.20. The complaint will be logged in the complaints register with a brief summary of the issue and a summary of actions taken. The complaints register will be submitted for consideration to the Academic Board.

Stage 3 – Review:

- 4.21. If the response to the complaint following completion of the Stage 2 procedure is not considered by the complainant to be acceptable, they may invoke Stage 3 which involves a review of the case by the Complaints Committee. Requests for review must be submitted by the complainant within **21 days** of the date of the outcome notification of the formal complaint.

- 4.22. The Complaints Committee convenes as required. This is to ensure that where a review of a formal complaint outcome is required, this can be provided by the Committee within the 10 working days target.
- 4.23. The grounds for requesting a review of a formal complaint outcome should be clearly stated in writing and sent with full supporting evidence to the Student Engagement Officer (emails should be sent to [the complaints@cecos.ac.uk address](mailto:complaints@cecos.ac.uk)), who will refer the case to the next Complaints Committee meeting if:
- There remains, at the time, a complaint which comes within the scope of this procedure;
 - The request for review has been lodged within the set time limit;
 - The complaint is not of a petty or harassing nature.
- 4.24. The review will not consider new evidence unless there are good reasons as to why such evidence was not produced at Stage 1 or 2 of the Complaints Procedure.
- 4.25. In the event of a decision not to uphold a complaint, the Complaints Committee will advise the complainant of the range of support services that are available such as Counselling Services, if appropriate.
- 4.26. The complainant will be formally notified in writing of the decision normally within **2 working days** of the Complaints Committee meeting. If a complaint is not upheld, the complainant will be informed of the reasons for its rejection. The letter will be copied to the Director of Quality and the Director of Operations or other designated senior academic, and/or the Head of Programme, as appropriate.
- 4.27. The decision of the Complaints Committee is final and concludes the CECOS Complaints Procedure.
- 4.28. The notification of outcome will advise the complainant of the opportunity for external review of the case, if available. In the case of validated degree programmes, students, who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the review and believe that the CECOS has failed to follow this procedure correctly, may take their case to the Awarding Body. Some programmes may additionally be eligible for review by the Office of the independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (*See next section*).

5. External Review by Validating Partner

- 5.1. A student should take their complaint to the programme's award validating partner only after the previous internal stages have been completed. The means of raising a complaint with a partner institution may vary in accordance with the partner's specific requirements.
- 5.2. In such circumstances CECOS will comply fully with the requests and requirements of the validating partner institution to facilitate the student's right to external review.

- 5.3. Where a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, the programme's award validating partner will communicate its findings to CECOS and the student. These will be reviewed by the programme's academic management and/or the Complaints Committee, and any outstanding actions will be implemented with the timeframe specified by the award validating partner.
- 5.4. Where the outcome of a complaint indicates that other students' learning experience may potentially be compromised by the same issue, CECOS will take appropriate action to protect the interests of other students and the integrity of its services. In such circumstances an action plan and general communicate will be coordinated by the programme's academic management.

6. Completion of Procedures

- 6.1. Complaints procedures are considered to be 'exhausted' only when all internal review stages AND external review by the award's validating partner (if applicable) have taken place, and any required actions have been implemented.
- 6.2. Once procedures have been exhausted, CECOS will inform the student/complainant that a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter can be requested. The COP letter will be provided within **2 working days** of a request. Such requests should be directed by the student to the Student Engagement Officer within 1 month of the notification of outcome.
- 6.3. If complaint is not upheld or there are found to be insufficient grounds to investigate a complaint or conduct a review, a COP letter will be issued to the student automatically by the Student Engagement Officer.

Contacting the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)

- 6.4. CECOS subscribes to the independent scheme for the review of student complaints and appeals. If a student remains unsatisfied with the outcome of the complaint or appeal following the completion of procedures, then they may be eligible to request a review by the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education \(OIA\)](#), for which a COP letter will be required. Details of how to contact the OIA will be provided on the COP letter.
- 6.5. A COP letter cannot be normally be issued before exhausting all procedures as stated above. However, in the interest of timely progression, where a student wishes to approach the OIA without first consulting the programme's awards validating partner, they may request a COP from their Administration for the purpose of doing so. In such instances the OIA will make a decision in accordance with its rules as to whether or not the appellant's request is eligible for review.
- 6.6. Should a student decide take their case to the OIA, their Scheme Application form must be received by the OIA within **12 months** of the date of the COP letter.

- 6.7. The OIA will communicate its findings to the student and to CECOS, who will act on them accordingly and within the specified timescale. Information on the process may be obtained directly from the OIA at: www.oiahe.org.uk An appeals can also be made in writing to:

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
Second Floor
Abbey Wharf
57-75 Kings Road
Reading
RG1 3AB
Telephone: 0118 959 9813
Email: enquiries@oiahe.org

7. Training and Awareness

The Student Services Team in consultation with the Director of Quality will organise activities to raise awareness of the Complaints Procedure, and how it is to be used, amongst the student body. The Student Services Team will also provide support and guidance for CECOS in handling complaints and resolving them as closely as possible to their point of origin.

8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

- 8.1. The Director of Quality and the Director of Operations supported by the Student Engagement Officer will oversee the tracking of complaints submitted at stages 1, 2 & 3 of the process and progressed through the Procedure, and will ensure that records show the nature of the complaint, the process employed to deal with the complaint, the time taken for each part of the process to be completed and the outcome. All data held will be monitored in accordance with the CECOS's Equality and Diversity and Data Protection Policies and will be impact assessed on an annual basis in line with CECOS procedures.
- 8.2. The Complaints Policy and Procedure will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Quality Management Group to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, compliant with the requirements of external regulatory bodies, and reflective of best practice within the industry.

CECOS College Complaints Form

NB. Before filling out this form students/complainants are requested to read the Complaints Procedure online or in the Student Handbook.

Formal request to the Programme Manager, Senior Manager or Principal to review a complaint.

Name	
Student id number (where appropriate)	
Course & Group (as appropriate)	
Request addressed to (name/position)	

Please conduct a formal review of my complaint described below. I have read the CECOS Complaints Procedure and I confirm that I have already tried to resolve the matter informally.

My complaint is (please describe the nature of the complaint as fully as possible):

--

In an attempt to resolve my complaint informally I have already spoken to the following people:

--

This is what happened, and why it did not resolve my complaint:

I have attached the documents listed below in support of my complaint

To resolve my complaint I would like the following to happen¹:

Complainant's signature	
Date	
Receiving officer signature	
Date	

¹ If you are asking for some financial redress, you must say what the figure is, and explain in detail, with supporting evidence, what financial loss you have incurred.

CECOS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



