



# College of Osteopaths

## Complaints Procedure for Students

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### 1. Introduction

The College of Osteopaths is committed to monitoring and evaluating its services to enhance their quality and ensure that they meet the standards outlined in our Student Charter and other appropriate policies and regulations.

The College also has in place a variety of mechanisms to ensure that students have the opportunity to take part in the decision making processes of the College at Programme Committee and Course Management Committee meetings and we hope and expect that students will take full advantage of these in making their views known.

Regular student feedback is also gathered through a variety of questionnaires and surveys that help us to use our resources in the best way possible to meet student needs.

We recognise that there may be occasions when these information and feedback mechanisms are not sufficient to deal with problems that may occur from time to time. For this reason the College of Osteopaths has a formal complaints procedure to ensure that complaints and comments are dealt with in an efficient and professional manner.

### 2. The College of Osteopaths' Complaints Procedure aims to:

- Be easily accessible and support students with a straightforward, appropriate and effective process for resolving complaints;
- Resolve complaints informally at local level wherever possible;
- To take complaints seriously but also to deal with them in a way that is appropriate to the issue complained about;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation
- Respect complaints desire for confidentiality wherever possible;
- Provide an effective response and appropriate redress when a complaint is upheld;
- Help us to keep on improving quality of what we do.

### 3. What is a complaint?

A student complaint is defined as:

‘an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about an University’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the University’

(OIA Good Practice Framework for handling complaints and academic appeals, 2016)

Examples of complaints include:

- standards of service
- actions or lack of actions by the College or its staff
- provisions of the College affecting individuals, students, customers or clients of any group

The complaints procedure does **NOT** cover:

- requests for new or different services or provision
- review of assessment boards decisions (appeals) and review of extenuating circumstances decisions
- incidents which are defined as being any form of abuse, harassment or bullying including those related to gender, race, physical abilities, sexual orientation, religion or age. These will be considered in accordance with the Student Disciplinary Procedure.
- staff grievance procedures

These are covered by separate policies and procedures, details of which can be found at the following link: <https://www.collegeofosteopaths.ac.uk/governance/> having considered a complaint, the Registrar or their nominee believes that it should be considered in accordance with an alternative procedure, the complaint will be re-classified and the student will be notified of this.

#### **4. Who Can Complain?**

- current or previous students, individually or in a group
- anyone seeking or receiving a service from the College or anyone who is affected by the activities of the College.
- Complaints should be raised within 3 calendar months of an issue occurring. Complaints submitted outside this time period will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Anonymous complaints are only accepted for consideration in exceptional circumstances. Complaints submitted by a third party will not normally be formally investigated. A complaint made by a third party will however be passed to the appropriate section as informal feedback.

If the complaint applies to a group or cohort of students, then it is expected that one person will act as a group representative and all communication will be through this representative. All students wishing to be considered as part of a group complaint will need to provide their name, student number and signature agreeing to the details within the complaint.

All complaints are given full consideration and students will not be disadvantaged for making a genuine complaint. The College expects that complainants will not engage in frivolous or vexatious complaints. Where a complainant fails to provide reasonable evidence to substantiate their allegations, the College reserves the right not to progress the complaint further. The College also expects that a complainant, or representative, will pursue any complaint in a proper manner which is compatible with the Student Charter. Students who do submit frivolous or vexatious complaints may be subject to Student Disciplinary procedure.

A frivolous or vexatious complaint can be characterised in a number of ways:

- obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

#### **5. Upon Receiving a Complaint**

The College will:

- handle the complaint in a quick, polite and straightforward way
- investigate the complaint thoroughly and impartially
- endeavour to keep the complainant informed at all stages of the process
- ensure that students, in particular, are not disadvantaged in any way by reason of raising the complaint.

### **5.1 Informal – Stage 1**

- (i) In the first instance all complaints must be raised informally and directly at the point at which the problem arose. Many apparent concerns arise from misunderstandings that can quickly be resolved by talking through the matter. In the first instance complaints should be raised directly with the member of staff. This can be done by discussing the matter with a member of staff within the College (such as the module or programme leader) or Service to which the complaint is related. Please contact the College for more information. If the source of a complaint is a matter of College policy or practice, the Education Support Officers (ESOs) can also offer advice.
- (ii) Alternatively, a complaint may be raised informally with the Education Support Officer. S/he will listen to the complaint and liaise with the Programme Leader to try to resolve the issues informally. All requests will be dealt with as promptly as possible.
- (iii) Possible outcomes for the person complaining:
  - (a) the matter is resolved or explained to the satisfaction of the person making the complaint;
  - (b) the person making the complaint decides they do not wish to pursue it;
  - (c) the matter is not resolved (or the member of staff feels that a formal investigation is required) and the complainant moves on to Stage 2.
- (iv) Possible outcomes for the College:
  - (a) If not already completed, an anonymised summary of the complaint (whether or not pursued by the complainant) is reported to the Registrar, together with the outcome.
  - (b) The complaint is reviewed alongside other complaints in preparation for the Annual Monitoring processes and generic or specific action is followed through via the Quality Review Board.
  - (c) Other staff may be briefed to prevent recurrence of the problem;
  - (d) If a complaint raises issues that needs to be addressed urgently, the Registrar shall take appropriate steps, which may include staff development, review of procedures and alerting Senior Management.

### **5.2 Formal – Stage 2**

- (i) If, having attempted to resolve the complaint informally, the complainant considers that the matter has not been satisfactorily resolved, they should complete a Complaints Form (See College website for form) or as appended to the end of this procedure.
- (ii) This must be done within 20 working days of the response made at the informal stage. The College reserves the right to reject any complaint made outside this timescale.
- (iii) The student should ensure that the form is completed fully and correctly. It should be clearly indicated on the form what remedy is sought as a result of the complaint and what the key issues are.

- (iv) If the form is not fully completed or the case to be considered is unclear, the complainant will be asked to submit further information. If a clear case is then not evidence, the College reserves the right to dismiss the complaint without investigation.
- (v) The completed complaints form should be forwarded to the Registrar ([k.hantom@collegeofosteopaths.ac.uk](mailto:k.hantom@collegeofosteopaths.ac.uk)) who will acknowledge its receipt within 5 working days. If a formal complaint is received prior to any attempt to resolve the matter informally, the Registrar will refer the complaint to the Education Support Officers or Service implicated for an informal resolution.
- (vi) If it is decided that a complaint requires a formal investigation, an Investigating Officer within the College will be appointed. The Investigating Officer, usually the Registrar, has the right to meet with and interview any person referred to in the complaint. In addition, if the complaint refers to the actions and/or behaviour of an individual, that individual will have the right to be interviewed in order to respond to such allegations or submit a written statement. If a complaint is about a member of the Senior Management Team, it will be referred to the Board of Governors.
- (v) A response will normally be sent to the complainant within 25 working days. If the complaint is likely to take longer than this to investigate, the College will keep the complainant informed of progress on a regular basis. If a complaint relates to another student or member of staff which leads to the initiation of the appropriate disciplinary procedures, the complainant will not be informed of the outcome of those procedures.
- (vi) Possible outcomes for the person complaining:
  - (a) the matter is resolved or explained to the satisfaction of the person making the complaint;
  - (b) the person making the complaint decides they do not wish to pursue it;
  - (c) the complaint raises a valid issue that requires an appropriate remedy;
  - (d) the complaint challenges the investigation because it has been unfair, did not act in accordance with fair procedures or infringes a legal right;
  - (e) in addition to any of the above, the appropriate member of staff or College may wish to issue an apology.
- (vii) Possible outcomes for the College:
  - (a) The complaint is reviewed alongside other complaints in preparation for the Annual Monitoring processes and generic or specific action is followed through via the Quality Review Board.
  - (b) Other staff may be briefed to prevent recurrence of the problem;
  - (c) If a complaint raises issues that needs to be addressed urgently, the Registrar shall take appropriate steps, which may include staff development, review of procedures and alerting Senior Management.

### **5.3 Complaint Review – Stage 3**

As the University of Derby is the validating university, if you're not satisfied with the response at the formal stage (by the College), you may write to Student Complaints and Conduct at the University of Derby to ask for the matter to be reviewed by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor. This can also be done using the University of Derby complaint form, and should be done within 10 working days of receiving the formal response. You will need to tell them clearly why you're dissatisfied, and they may ask you to provide further information before proceeding with the complaint review.

## **6. Confidentiality**

As far as is practicable, confidentiality shall be preserved in the investigation of a complaint. Such an approach is in the interest of both the complainant and any individual members of staff involved. If, however, an individual is named in a complaint, the College believes that normally they should know what is said about them and who is making the complaint. The College may also take action if a complaint is found to be malicious or vexatious.

## **7. Disabled Students**

The College takes its responsibilities to disabled students seriously. If a complainant requires reasonable adjustments in order to attend a hearing or interview, they should notify the College in advance and we will aim to meet individual needs. This could mean the College relocating the hearing to a more accessible venue and/or making arrangements for a communicator or advocate to be present at the hearing.

To enable the College to do this, requests should be submitted to the Registrar, or email [k.hantom@collegeofosteopaths.ac.uk](mailto:k.hantom@collegeofosteopaths.ac.uk) at least 5 working days before the hearing.

## **8. Equality and Diversity**

The College of Osteopaths is committed to ensuring that anyone who studies, works at or interacts with the College will experience a culture of openness in which everyone is valued equally and respected.

We will not tolerate any individual being subjected to abuse, harassment or bullying particularly because of their gender, race, physical abilities, sexual orientation, religion or age. If a student has been subjected to abuse, harassment or bullying for any reason, they may notify the College and the matter will be considered in accordance with the Student Disciplinary Procedure.

## **9. Legal Notice**

The College reserves the right to suspend investigations into a complaint if a legal challenge is issued against the College or if there is a police investigation ongoing in relation to a complaint.

## **10. Who To Contact For Advice**

ESO (Student Support): Julie Thompson: [j.thompson@collegeofosteopaths.ac.uk](mailto:j.thompson@collegeofosteopaths.ac.uk)

## **11. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education**

The College of Osteopaths is a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's complaints handling scheme. If a complaint has completed all the stages of the College's and the University of Derby's Complaints Procedure, but the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response, they may apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education at the following address:

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)  
Second Floor  
Abbey Gate  
57-75 Kings Road  
Reading  
RG1 3AB  
Tel: 0118 959 9813  
Email: [enquiries@oiahe.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@oiahe.org.uk)

To use this service, the complainant will need a Completion of Procedures letter from the University. This is provided automatically when a complainant has completed the Complaint's Procedures. If at any stage the complainant feels that they do not have grounds to continue to the next stage of the process, a Completion of Procedure letter can be requested. Scheme Application Forms, and guidance on how to apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, are available from the University Information Centres

**12. Web-links to named policies and procedures:**

[Student Charter](#)

[Student Conduct & Disciplinary Policy](#)

[Fitness to Practise Policy](#)

