

Complaints Policy & Procedures

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Purpose

The School of Information Risk Management (SIRM) is committed to providing high-quality education and services to all our students. However, we recognise that there may be times when you feel that you have not received the high quality of education or level of service that you are reasonably entitled to expect.

We aim to provide a supportive environment for you and to be responsive to your concerns when they are raised. We view the Student Complaints Procedure as an opportunity to monitor and make improvements to the quality of our services.

This policy provides the framework within which anyone who has experienced dissatisfaction with SIRM services can raise their concerns. It does not replace SIRM policies and procedures for academic appeals and disciplinary action; those policies and procedures should be used where appropriate.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is broadly defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about SIRM's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided."

The complaints process is designed to provide an opportunity for you to make a complaint about SIRM's services or staff. We undertake to investigate all issues that are raised and deal with them through a process that is fair, consistent, timely and easy to follow.

Scope

This policy applies to all complaints received from enrolled learners and applicants for admissions, contractors, local residents, visitors and others.

Anyone not satisfied with the service should feel able to approach relevant staff to address their concerns promptly and directly.

Any expressed dissatisfaction with the following will be treated as a complaint:

- Failure by SIRM to meet obligations, including those outlined in course/learner handbooks
- Concerns about the delivery of a course, quality of teaching or administration
- The quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided directly by SIRM
- Complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing services on behalf of SIRM

Staff complaints will be resolved using the SIRM Grievance Procedure.

Complaints which are deemed to fall into any of the below categories will not be considered under the scope of this policy and procedure:

- Anonymous
- Already been investigated and disposed of
- Outside the scope of the procedure
- Made without disclosing adequate grounds
- Made outside the time limit

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- Been disposed of in court or tribunal proceedings brought by the complainant or under a settlement agreement between the complainant and SIRM
- Are malicious, vexatious or frivolous

Every attempt should be made to resolve complaints informally through a dialogue with those immediately concerned.

SIRM Accountability

All SIRM staff have a responsibility for receiving complaints, treating them seriously, and dealing with them promptly and courteously in accordance with the procedures set out below.

Complaints will usually be investigated by the manager responsible for the provision, service, procedure or facility about which the complaint is made.

The SIRM Principal is responsible for resolving complaints which have reached the appeals stage and may nominate any other appropriate Manager who has not been previously involved to investigate.

The SIRM Registrar is responsible for dealing with referrals after the appeals stage where a complainant remains dissatisfied with how their complaint has been dealt with by SIRM.

The Registrar is responsible for ensuring that the complaints policy is operating effectively and may become directly involved if a complaint is directed against the Principal, or members of the Management team.

Complainant Responsibility

Complainants are expected to bring their complaint to the attention of SIRM within one of the reasons for the complaint occurring.

To facilitate the investigation the complainant should explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible (such as including names, times, dates) and include any action taken to date.

Complainants must recognise that in some circumstances are beyond the control of SIRM which will impact the final outcome of any complaint.

Principles

We encourage early and local resolution wherever possible by operating a complaints process that is simple, open and accessible.

A group of students may use this procedure to make a collective complaint, provided that one of you identifies yourself as the main contact for purposes of communication.

We recognise that making a complaint can be stressful. You are therefore advised to seek advice and support before making a complaint from the Student Welfare Manager.

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As far as possible, matters raised as a complaint will remain confidential to those directly involved in investigating the complaint, providing a response to it and communicating with you, unless there is a serious risk of harm to any parties. However, in the interests of natural justice, parties to a complaint have the right to know the full details of the complaint or, in exceptional circumstances, only those details which need to be shared to enable a proper response to be made.

Where a complaint of harassment and bullying is made by you against a member of staff, the complaint may be referred for consideration under the Bullying and Harassment Policy & Procedure.

Those investigating or adjudicating upon a complaint at any stage of the procedure will do so impartially. Anyone with a material personal interest in the complaint will neither investigate nor adjudicate.

Where a shortcoming in provision or process is acknowledged, a complaint may be addressed by offering an apology or an acceptable explanation for the deficiency, by undertaking to implement future improvement, or by a mutually acceptable course of action to address the individual circumstances of the case.

You will not be disadvantaged as a result of raising a matter of concern or of making a complaint, provided it is made in good faith. Where a complaint is shown to be vexatious, the complaint will be rejected and disciplinary action may be taken.

In the event of a set of circumstances legitimately giving rise to grounds for both an academic appeal and a formal complaint, the Appeals Investigation Officer and the Complaints Investigation Officer will jointly determine in consultation with you the manner in which the two matters will be resolved and the appropriate timescales. All parties will ensure that the requirements of the respective procedures are fully adhered to.

Who does this procedure apply to?

You can submit a complaint if:

- You are a currently registered on a School programme;
- You are on an approved leave of absence;
- You are a graduate or former student, provided that your complaint is lodged within three months of completing or formally ceasing your studies.

You cannot submit a complaint if:

- The matter has already been considered as an academic appeal, a disciplinary matter or where the police are dealing with the matter until police procedures are complete;
- You have applied for admission to the School but have not yet been accepted and registered;
- You are a graduate or former student but failed to lodge a complaint within three months of completing or formally ceasing your studies.

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A complaint from a third party other than you will only be considered if you are incapacitated for medical reasons or hospitalised or have known mental health issues or a registered disability. This may also be permitted in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Registrar.

Timescales

Whenever possible any concerns will be dealt with as soon as any member of the SIRM staff is made aware of them.

SIRM will only respond to formal complaints that have been raised within 3 months of the occurrence of the complaint.

A formal complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt by the Complaints Officer.

SIRM Complaints Officer will maintain a full record of complaints received and their outcome.

Following the investigation of a formal complaint, a response will be sent to the complainant within 20 working days. Where more time is needed, e.g. the complaint is complex or SIRM term breaks prevent the completion of the investigation, the complainant will be sent an interim letter outlining progress with the investigation and giving a date for the full response.

A complainant has the right to appeal against the response to his/her complaint. Responses to complaints will include details on appeals. Valid appeals will usually be investigated and responded to within 20 working days.

What does the procedure cover?

Complaints against any academic or non-academic service provided by the School, including but not limited to:

- Failure to meet obligations including those outlined in student handbooks
- Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the School
- Concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching, supervision or administration
- Poor quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided by the School

What issues cannot be considered under this policy?

Complaints about other students. These should in the first instance be directed to your Teacher/Assessor, which may lead to consideration under the Student Disciplinary Procedure. However, you may complain about our handling of your complaint against another student or students.

The Procedures dealing with complaints in SIRM

Stage 1 (Informal)

At this informal stage, complaints may be made in person, by phone or by email. The complainant should raise their concerns with the member of staff who has direct responsibility for the matter in question to try to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

A complaint should be raised not later than 1 week after the incident.

Every reasonable effort should be made to resolve the complaint promptly and informally at a local level.

If appropriate, a meeting will be offered between the complainant and representative(s) of the area to which the complaint refers in order to achieve an agreed resolution.

If the complainant is unable to raise their concern with the staff who has direct responsibility, then the complaint should be made to the appropriate Manager.

Verbal complaints to reception and staff in public areas or requests to meet with a manager should be referred to the appropriate Manager of the area to which the complaint refers.

The complainant must be kept informed of progress at all stages, with an acknowledgement of the complaint made within 3 working days, and an initial response within 5 working days.

If the complainant does not feel that their concerns have been addressed by the member of staff or the complaint cannot be resolved within Stage 1 procedures, then the complaint should be referred to Stage 2.

Stage 2 (Formal)

Where a complainant has been through Stage 1 and remains dissatisfied they should submit their complaint in writing to the SIRM Complaints Officer.

If SIRM Department receives a formal complaint in writing, they must add the date when it was received before passing the communication immediately to the Complaints Officer who will log it and acknowledge its receipt to the complainant.

On receipt of a formal complaint, the SIRM Complaints Officer will log the complaint using the SIRM Complaint Report Log and acknowledge its receipt within 5 working days.

The Complaints Officer will then appoint an appropriate investigating manager who will conduct a full investigation and this will normally be the relevant Head of Department/ Service. However, if that person has already had some involvement with the issue, another Head of Department will be appointed to conduct the investigation.

Within 20 working days of receiving a complaint from the Complaints Officer, the investigating manager will provide the Complaints Officer with the results of the investigation and a signed letter of reply to the complainant detailing the outcome and actions arising from the investigation.

In highly exceptional cases, where the investigating manager is unable to meet the set timescale, e.g. where the complaint is complex or SIRM term breaks prevents the completion of the investigation, the investigating manager will inform the Complaints Officer, who, in turn, will send complainant an interim letter outlining progress with the investigation and giving a date for the full response.

The investigating manager dealing with the complaint, will investigate it and decide to:

- dismiss the complaint as unfounded and give reasons
- propose an amicable settlement
- uphold or partially uphold the complaint, offer an apology, take appropriate steps to address the issue and to avoid a similar problem arising in future

All formal complaints receive a written response outlining the outcome and the right of appeal where appropriate. All formal complaints will be recorded and periodically reported to the SIRM Advisory Board.

Appeals

The complainant has the right to appeal against the response to his/her complaint under Stage 2, they may appeal in writing to the Principal. The Principal will nominate a representative, who should be a manager not previously involved in the case, who will investigate the complaint and SIRM response and report to the Principal.

The complainant should submit the appeal within 10 working days after receiving the written response to the complaint.

The appeal may only be made on one or more of the following grounds:

- that there is additional evidence that could not have been made available at the time the original complaint was considered
- the proper procedure was not followed

The letter of appeal should clearly state the grounds of appeal. Any appeals which do not include this information will not be considered.

The Principal will decide to:

- uphold the original decision/ dismiss the complaint as unfounded
- refer the complaint back to an area and propose an amicable settlement
- uphold or partially uphold the complaint, offer an apology, recommend appropriate steps are taken to address the issue and to avoid a similar problem arising in the future

The decision of the Principal is final and the complainant will be advised in writing of the outcome within 20 working days.

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Both the appeal and the response will be copied to the SIRM Complaints Officer.

There is no further right of appeal within the SIRM's procedures.

Taking a Complaint Further

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the SIRM response following an appeal, they should write to the SIRM Registrar.

Only after all SIRM procedures for dealing with complaints have been exhausted and if the complainant feels that SIRM has not dealt with the complaint according to this procedure, a complaint should be referred to the relevant external agency.

Independent Adjudication

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint process you may be able to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) providing that your complaint is eligible under its Rules, which are available on the OIA website at <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>. You will need to send to the OIA a Scheme Application Form within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. A Scheme Application Form can be downloaded from the OIA website.

If you are studying for an apprenticeship, you can request the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to review whether the apprenticeship provider has properly investigated your original complaint in line with its procedures. Complaints about providers should be sent to: complaints.esfa@education.gov.uk or via: The Complaints Team, Education and Skills Funding Agency, Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT.

Record Keeping, Monitoring and Reporting

SIRM Managers should maintain a clear record of all complaints and appeals dealt with for a minimum of 2 years.

Complainants will be advised that, while confidentiality will be respected as far as possible, it is not normally possible to resolve complaints without disclosing details of a complaint to relevant staff in order to allow SIRM a fair opportunity to resolve the issue.

An annual report to The Advisory Board will provide an analysis of complaints and the action which SIRM has taken as a result of them.

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The monitoring process will be used to ensure that all complainants are treated fairly and equally. SIRM will collect and analyse the following information on complainants (where available) to identify differences between groups and to allow issues to be identified and addressed:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnic origin
- Disability
- Course and mode of study (if applicable)

Access to the Policy

The Policy will be published on the SIRM intranet and available to learners and members of the public on request.

The Policy and Procedures will be made available within 5 working days by request to the Complaints Officer.

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Contacts for Making a Complaint

The postal address:

The School of Information Risk Management (SIRM)
Ilford Chamber, 4th Floor
11 Chapel Road, Ilford, IG1 2DR

Complaints Officer: complaints.officer@sirm.ac.uk

Director Admin: s.bispham@sirm.ac.uk

Registrar: j.elahi@sirm.ac.uk



Student Formal Complaint Form

To ensure that we can investigate your complaint effectively, and for our monitoring purposes, it is essential that all areas of this form are completed.

Name:

(Please note that we are unable to accept anonymous complaints as described in SIRM Complaints Policy and Procedure. Please be assured however that all complaints are dealt with confidentially).

Learner ID:

Address:

Email:

Tel No:

Programme:

What caused your complaint? Please select

Staff

Fellow Student

Process / Procedures

Study resources / College equipment

Policies / Rules / Regulations

Other (please state)

If this complaint has been discussed with a member of staff, please give name(s):

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Please use this space below to inform us of your Complaint. Include as much information as possible, including dates and locations as well as the steps you have taken so far to resolve your complaint. (You may use a separate sheet if you required).

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Your complaint will be investigated and you should expect to receive a response as per SIRM Complaints Policy & Procedure.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.

How do you see your complaint being resolved?

Please read the following statements and tick the appropriate box to indicate your agreement:

- I have read and understood the SIRM Complaints Procedure.
- All the information provided is an accurate and truthful reflection of the situation that lead to the complaint outlined above.
- I am aware that, regardless of the outcome of this complaint, this form will be held in accordance with the Complaints Policy & Procedure and the Data Protection Policy.

Signature:

Date:

This form is to be submitted in a sealed envelope or emailed to the dedicated staff.

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Office Use

Form Received by: Date:

Form Passed to: Date:

Outcome:

Date learner informed of Complaint outcome:

Learner Appealed:

Yes

No