



Guidance for Student Radiographers on the Grievance Process

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Summary

SCoR publishes this guidance to help student radiographers in the event of them having a complaint or grievance. The guidance outlines how to follow grievance procedures. The aim of any grievance procedure is to bring about the rapid resolution of grievances at the lowest possible level and, wherever possible, with formal procedures being invoked only if informal discussion fails to resolve the matter satisfactorily.

Introduction

If a student radiographer has a complaint (or grievance) about any aspect of student life, it should be raised with an appropriate person at the earliest opportunity, as complaints that are dealt with informally at an early stage have the best chance of being resolved effectively. Education Institutions (EIs) make every effort to deal with grievances sympathetically. However, students do need to think of what outcomes they are hoping to gain. A grievance can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction concerning the provision of a programme of study or related academic or administrative service.

Grievances can arise when a radiography student is unhappy about their personal situation regarding their course, their practice placement, or in their dealings with other students or with staff. In all cases, a speedy resolution of such grievances is in the interests of all concerned.

This guidance outlines how to follow grievance procedures. The aim of any grievance procedure is to bring about the rapid resolution of grievances at the lowest possible level and, wherever possible, with formal procedures being invoked only if informal discussion fails to resolve the matter satisfactorily. Informal resolution remains an option at all stages of the procedure.

The object of any grievance procedure is to ensure that grievances are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner. This document is designed to act as guidance to radiography students and EIs and is based on good practice. It is the responsibility of students to become acquainted with the policies and procedures of their EI.

Complaints

A complaint may be defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction that needs a response". This may take the form of an informal, verbal complaint or a formal, written complaint.

Radiography students should follow the students' complaints procedure which is provided by EIs to pursue complaints about issues concerning both teaching and learning (e.g teaching facilities, supervision arrangements, clinical placements etc) and non-academic issues (e.g support services, accommodation etc).

The students' complaints procedure is not usually used to challenge academic decisions about performance and progress.

If a complaint is general rather than specific in nature, it is probably more appropriate to ask the student representative to raise it at the Student Staff Feedback Committee, or other appropriate committee or group.

Complaints will be treated seriously by EIs and students will not suffer any disadvantage or recrimination as a result of making a complaint in good faith. However, complaints should not be made frivolously, vexatiously or with malice. Students are also advised to seek advice from the Students' Union at any stage in the complaints process, including advice on how to present their case effectively.

Normally there are timeframes in which complaints should be made. If the relevant circumstances take place outside the timeframe they may not be processed therefore it is important to make timely complaints and follow the procedures set up by the individual EIs.

Confidentiality

If information is to be kept confidential, the student should make this clear to the person to whom a complaint is made. Students should understand that in exceptional circumstances it may be difficult for confidentiality to be respected (e.g where a criminal offence has been disclosed). Students should also understand that in some circumstances the demand for confidentiality may make it difficult for the HEI to assist them with their complaint.

Grievances

A grievance can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction concerning the provision of a programme of study or related academic or administrative service. It is important, that, wherever possible, concerns or potential grievances are dealt with as early as possible.

Collective Grievances

There are circumstances where a grievance applies to more than one student. The details of the grievance must therefore be put in writing and signed by all who are party to the grievance. Normally one person will be nominated to represent the group.

Support from Student Representatives

Students who are encountering difficulties or have issues that need to be addressed can raise issues with their student representative. Students are encouraged to contact their student representative to see what support they can offer.

Support from the Students' Union

The Students' Union offers support to students who are encountering difficulties and the Union can raise issues which affect a number of students. Contact your Student Union to see what support they can offer you.

Feedback and suggestions

Sometimes a student may not wish to make a formal complaint, but wants to make the EI aware of an issue which could benefit from improvement. Sometimes a student may wish to highlight a particularly commendable level of service which might benefit from being introduced elsewhere. In either case, students are encouraged to do this constructively in order to be positively received and acknowledged. Students should write to the appropriate Head of Faculty/School.

Mediation Service

EIs may have a mediation service which provides impartial student mediators. These are members of staff who have undergone specialised training in mediation and will have no prior connection to the complaint or appeal.

The student mediator's task is to attempt to help all those involved find a resolution to the problem. They will see the student and the staff member(s) involved in the dispute, generally separately first and then together. The student mediator's role is not to suggest or impose solutions but to facilitate open discussions between all parties. All discussions with the student mediator are confidential.

The mediation process may result in agreement that certain actions should be taken by the student or by the staff member(s) concerned, or in acceptance that, in the light of the discussions, no further action is appropriate. If the student remains dissatisfied, they may take the complaint or appeal to the EI.

Grievance Procedure

This section briefly describes the grievance procedure. This is only an overview as all EIs will have their own grievance procedures and policies and it is important that students follow their own EI's policies as stated.

Keep records

It is vital that students keep records detailing the nature of their grievance, the responses given and any action taken and the reasons for the action. These records will be essential should their grievance reach a hearing stage.

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In cases of harassment or bullying allegations it is particularly important to keep contemporaneous notes, usually in the form of a diary.

Records should be kept of all meetings detailing:

- the nature of the grievance raised
- a note of the meeting held to hear the grievance
- the EI's response
- any action taken and the reasons for this
- whether there was an appeal
- a note of the appeal meeting
- the outcome of the appeal meeting

The informal procedure

Many students are still reluctant to complain therefore starting with an informal approach to solving the problem is best. It is expected that students should try to resolve a complaint/grievance directly, informally and quickly with the person concerned, for example, with a lecturer who didn't hand work back in time or with the person giving incorrect information.

If for any reason a student feels uncomfortable about doing this on their own, they may be accompanied by another student, their student representative, or they can ask the Students' Union for support.

The student is expected to explain clearly what the problem is and what outcome they are seeking, and the member of staff is expected to listen to the complaint and to use their best endeavours to try to resolve it in a straightforward and reasonable manner. Staff dealing with complaints are encouraged, whenever practical, to meet with the student. Face-to-face discussions are often very helpful to establish the precise cause of dissatisfaction, to explore the remedy sought by the student and to foster a mutual understanding of the issues involved. If a mistake has been made it is hoped an apology will be offered.

Students can also raise their grievance with their personal tutor or with a member of staff from the teaching team or Student Services who will provide help, support and advice. Grievances may also be channelled through student representatives. Whilst seeking help and support from their personal tutor or with a member of staff from the teaching team or Student Services they can become the student's representative and can try to sort out the grievances without using formal complaints and sanctions (this is 'conciliation').

Things which students need to clarify with their representative:

- Will they use your name?
- When will they take action and what action will they take on your behalf?
- When can you find out what happened as a result of any action taken?
- What to do next if this doesn't work?
- What should you do next?

If the first person approached is not very helpful, students are encouraged not to give up. Try someone else. If the matter is not resolved with the help of your representative at this level you should look to take your grievance to a more senior staff member as appropriate.

If the student is a member of the Society and College of Radiographers, they can talk initially to their Regional Officer in confidence or another Regional or Professional Officer. Contact details of all officers are on the website www.sor.org or call 020 7740 7200.

It is hoped that most complaints can be resolved in an informal way. If the grievance has been resolved informally, no record will be kept on file unless all parties wish to have a note of what has

been agreed.

If an informal approach does not lead to a satisfactory outcome, or if the student doesn't feel able to discuss the matter with the person(s) involved, they may opt to invoke the formal grievance procedure.

The formal procedure

If the student is unable to resolve the grievance informally, or are dissatisfied with the outcome, the formal procedure should be followed. Students may raise grievances jointly. This is called a Collective Grievance.

Grievances must be raised promptly. The EI may not entertain complaints that are made substantially after the issues complained about took place, unless there is good reason for the delay.

If, with good reason, the student considers it more appropriate in the first instance or if the grievance remains unresolved, the student may invoke the formal stage by following the formal complaints policy which each EI will have. It is important to follow this policy correctly. The Student Services, or other, will act impartially and will be happy to give advice to the student about any issues of concern. It is advisable to seek their assistance through the formal process.

On receipt of a formal grievance being lodged, the EI will consider whether appropriate action has been taken to seek resolution at the informal stage. In some cases, in cooperation with departments or individuals, it may be possible to resolve the grievance without recourse to a hearing.

Mediation may be sought, as mentioned previously. This is highly recommended. If the grievance is resolved through mediation, the student mediator may put any agreement in writing for your benefit. If the parties have agreed to the terms of any mediation, the subsequent agreement will be binding. If the grievance is unresolved, or if mediation did not take place, you may request a hearing. Details on how to take this forward will be provided within each EI's grievance/complaints policy.

The grievance panel will consider the request for a hearing and may:

- refer the matter back to an appropriate person with an instruction or recommendation for resolution. If the instruction or recommendation is not carried out, the student may refer the matter back to the panel for reconsideration
- dismiss the grievance, giving reasons, and issue a letter stating completion of the grievance
- recommend that a committee be appointed to hear the complaint
- ask the parties to reconsider any decision not to enter into mediation.

Examples of grievances which you may wish to take through a formal process include:

- Alleged deficiency in supervision received or alleged unsatisfactory delivery/administration of a programme e.g.
 - that inadequate teaching/supervision was provided for some or all parts of the programme
 - that published information about the programme was substantively misleading
 - that the programme was not organised or delivered in accordance with the information and documentation provided to students on the programme.
- The results of assessments and examinations (including alleged bias in the assessment) e.g.
 - that there has been an arithmetical or transcription error in the compilation of the marks and/or the result
 - that the examiners could not reasonably have been made aware, formally, of special circumstances (e.g illness) notified by the candidate which
 - significantly affected his/her performance in the examination
 - that either the examination and/or classification process was not conducted in

- accordance with the relevant regulations/procedures
- that there is substantive evidence that one or more of the examiners can be shown to have been biased or prejudiced against the candidate in one or more specific examinations.
- A decision not to readmit a student or to allow a student to continue on a programme of study on the grounds of unsatisfactory academic performance
- Bullying and harassment by members of staff or other students.

Conduct of Hearings

Hearings will normally be held in private. A hearing may be held in public at the request of the student provided that it is agreed by any member or members of staff specifically complained about by the student. In the event of any member of staff specifically involved in the complaint not agreeing to the student's request, a decision whether to hold the hearing in public shall usually be made by the Chair of the grievance panel whose decision will be final.

Both the student and member(s) of staff concerned shall be entitled to be present throughout a hearing except when the panel deliberates on its decision. Only in exceptional circumstances, and with the agreement of all parties, may individuals be heard separately. Each party will be entitled to be accompanied during the panel hearing by a friend or 'representative', whose role is as follows:

- to provide moral support during an interview or hearing
- to help you present your case
- to ensure that the interview or hearing is conducted in a fair and appropriate manner in accordance with the relevant procedures under which the representation is being considered.

The Decision

The grievance panel will let the academic registrar know the outcome of the hearing, giving detailed reasons for the decision and what action, if any, should be taken in respect of the student.

The academic registrar will write to the student and the respondent(s) letting them know the decision, giving the reasons for it and indicating what compensating action, if any, will be taken.

Subject to the rights of appeal, all decisions made in accordance with these procedures shall be binding on all parties.

Appeals procedure

Notice of intention to appeal by either the student or member(s) of staff or School/Faculty concerned against the decision of the grievance panel should be made in writing as set out in the EI's appeals procedure.

An appeal should normally be made only on one or more of the following grounds:

- that the representation was not conducted according to the EIs procedures
- that new evidence has become available which was not, and which could not reasonably have been, made available to the grievance panel
- that the action agreed by the grievance panel was either excessive or inadequate in relation to the grievance.

As soon as is practicable after receipt of the intention to appeal, the appeals panel will decide on the evidence available whether or not the appeal should proceed.

If it is decided not to proceed with the appeal, the student will be informed of the decision, giving reasons. Where it is decided that the appeal shall proceed, all parties will be informed of the decision

and arrangements will be made to review the case as early as possible.

An appeals panel will review all the evidence, seek further clarification of the written evidence from whoever it feels appropriate and have the power to reverse or modify the appeal to the decision in any way that it thinks fit. Only exceptionally, and on its own initiative, will an appeals panel interview the student and member(s) of staff concerned.

The appeals panel will notify the academic registrar in writing of the outcome of the appeal and will, in turn, notify all parties of the decision of the appeals panel. A decision by the appeals panel will be final. Compensating action agreed in the light of the initial representation will not normally be implemented until the outcome of the appeal is known.

Note: Educational institutions often have a range of appeals procedures which may be used in cases where a student wishes to challenge an academic decision which has been made by an academic committee or body (such as an Academic Award Board).

Completion of procedures

As required by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), if a university is unable to resolve a complaint to the student's satisfaction and there are no further steps available to the student, the university will issue a formal "completion of procedures" letter. This provides a formal confirmation that the student has exhausted the internal complaints procedure, and is required before a complaint may be considered by the OIA.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator Student Complaints Scheme

If the student is still not satisfied, they may take their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education which provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. All higher education institutions are required to comply with the scheme which came into effect from 1 January 2005.

The OIA has been established to provide an independent scheme for the resolution of student complaints. The OIA will consider cases only when the higher education institution's own internal appeal procedures have been exhausted. It will not intervene on matters which turn purely on academic assessment.

Areas of complaints covered by the OIA include:

- any final decision of the university
- a service provided by the university
- teaching and facilities
- student accommodation
- research supervision
- welfare
- discrimination - race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or religious belief
- bullying and harassment
- placements
- maladministration
- procedural irregularities
- unfair practices
- disciplinary matters, including plagiarism
- fitness to practice issues.

The OIA will not advise about a complaint in the following areas:

- admissions

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- academic judgment
- student employment
- matters which have already been considered by a court or tribunal and where the proceedings have been concluded
- matters which are being considered by a court or tribunal where the proceedings have not been stayed.
- matters which they consider have not materially affected the complainant as a student
- matters which the OIA has already dealt with.
- It will, in addition, not normally look at complaints where the main issues of complaint took place more than three years before the complaint was received by the OIA.

Further information about this scheme is available on the OIA website www.oiahe.org.uk

Before a student lodges a grievance this checklist may be used to think it through

- Act early - don't let a grievance fester. Try tackling the problem at source, by speaking to the person directly responsible. Take a friend with you, if this helps.
- Ask yourself what your complaint or grievance is really about.
- Consider what outcome you want.
- Write down your grievance and the desired outcome.
- Read the student complaints procedure at your university to ensure you follow the procedure correctly.
- If you are unsure about whether or how to proceed, contact the Student Complaints Officer (or someone in a similar role).
- If you are unhappy about discussing the problem in your department, consider going to the undergraduate or graduate dean in your faculty.
- If you prefer, you can go to the Adviser in the Students' Union or to a student representative for help.

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