Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

Student Complaints Procedure 2026/27

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Approved by	Senate
Owner	Academic Registrar, Student Conduct and Complaints Manager
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1. Introduction

1.1. This Procedure explains how the Royal College of Art ('the College') will consider and respond to complaints made under the Student Complaints Policy.

1.2. The Procedure is intended to provide a fair, accessible, proportionate and timely way of considering complaints, while supporting the early resolution of concerns where this is appropriate.

1.3. The Procedure has three stages:

- Stage 1: Local Resolution
- Stage 2: Formal Complaint
- Stage 3: Institutional Review

1.4. Before making a formal complaint, students are encouraged to raise concerns informally, and as soon as they feel able to. The College provides a number of other ways to do this, for example:

- Speaking to the Students' Union, an independent body that can raise issues with the College on a student's behalf;
- Speaking to a student representative, coordinated by the Students' Union;
- Directing information to feedback@rca.ac.uk;
- Programme Forums and Doctoral Students Forums;
- The annual student experience survey;
- Reporting a concern on the RCA Report and Support site, which does not automatically trigger an investigation, but leads to a member of the Student Support team contacting the student to discuss it and the options available.

1.5. Students may raise concerns directly with the relevant School, Service or member of staff before making a formal complaint, where they consider this appropriate. Students may also submit a complaint directly to the Student Casework team. A complaint submitted to the Student Casework team will be assessed and allocated to the appropriate stage in accordance with this Procedure.

1.6. The Student Casework team is responsible for the central administration and oversight of complaints under this Procedure, and can be contacted at casework@rca.ac.uk.

1.7. Where appropriate, and with the agreement of everyone involved, the College may offer mediation or conciliation to help resolve a concern. This is voluntary and confidential; either party may decline or withdraw without this being held against them. Where mediation is attempted, the timescales in this Procedure are paused while it takes place, with an agreed revised timescale.

2. Making a Complaint and Time Limits

2.1. A complaint should normally be submitted **within one calendar month** of the event or circumstances giving rise to the complaint. Where a complaint concerns a continuing matter, it should normally be submitted **within one calendar month** of the most recent occurrence.

2.2. The Student Casework team may accept a request submitted outside the timeframe where there is a reasonable explanation for the delay and it is fair and reasonable to do so, having considered the circumstances of the case.

2.3. Students are encouraged to raise concerns as soon as possible, where appropriate, as this may provide an opportunity for concerns to be resolved quickly and locally.

2.4. A complaint should be submitted using the RCA Student Complaints Form. Students should provide as much relevant information and supporting evidence as they can at the time of submission, as this will help the College understand the concerns raised and may avoid unnecessary delay.

2.5. The same Student Complaints Form is used to submit complaints for consideration under either Stage 1 or Stage 2. The Student Casework team will assess the complaint and determine the appropriate stage in accordance with this Procedure. Students do not need to submit a separate form where a complaint is allocated directly to Stage 2.

2.6. Where a third party wishes to raise a complaint on a student's behalf, the student's written consent must be provided with the complaint, using the relevant section of the form, in line with the Student Complaints Policy.

2.7. Where a complaint is raised by a group of students, the form should include the names and student ID numbers of everyone included, and each student's written confirmation that they wish to be included and consent to the lead representative

communicating with the College on their behalf, in line with the Student Complaints Policy.

3. Initial Assessment and Allocation

3.1. On receipt of a complaint, the Student Casework team will carry out an initial assessment to determine whether the complaint, in full or part, can be considered under the Student Complaints Policy and the appropriate way in which the matters raised should be managed.

3.2. As part of the initial assessment, the Student Casework team may consider:

- Whether the complaint falls within the scope of the Student Complaints Policy;
- Whether the complaint has been submitted within the applicable timeframe, or there is a reason to accept a complaint submitted outside that timeframe;
- Whether the matters raised have been appropriately considered, or are being considered, under another College policy or procedure;
- Whether the complaint requires extensive fact-finding, formal investigation or consideration of disputed evidence that would not be appropriate or proportionate at Stage 1; and
- Whether sufficient information has been provided to understand the substantive concerns raised.

3.3. Following initial assessment, the Student Casework team may determine that different aspects of a complaint should be considered separately, together or under different College procedures, in accordance with the Student Complaints Policy. Where appropriate, the College may also determine that matters should be considered concurrently, that one process should be paused pending the outcome of another, or that findings reached under another process may be taken into account.

3.4. Where a complaint, or part of a complaint, falls outside the scope of the Student Complaints Policy, the Student Casework team will explain the reason for this decision and, where possible, identify the most appropriate route for the matter to be considered.

3.5. Where a complaint is suitable for local resolution and does not require extensive fact-finding or formal investigation, it will normally be allocated to Stage 1. Where the nature, seriousness or complexity of the matters raised means that extensive fact-finding, investigation of disputed evidence or other formal investigation is necessary, the complaint will normally be allocated directly to Stage 2.

3.6. Where a complaint has been considered at Stage 1, a student may request further consideration at Stage 2 where they remain dissatisfied with the outcome or consider that the matter has not been adequately resolved.

3.7. The Student Casework team will notify the student of the outcome of the initial assessment and the stage or procedure through which the matter will be considered.

4. Stage 1: Local Resolution

4.1. Stage 1 is intended to provide an opportunity for concerns to be considered and, where possible, resolved by the School or Service of the College most closely connected to the matter. Stage 1 is normally appropriate where the matters raised can be considered proportionately without extensive fact-finding or formal investigation.

4.2. Where a complaint has been allocated to Stage 1, the Student Casework team will identify, in consultation with the relevant School or Service, an appropriate person to consider the complaint.

4.3. The individual appointed to respond to the complaint is responsible for considering the concerns raised, making any enquiries reasonably necessary to establish the relevant facts, and providing a written response to the student. The response should address the substantive issues raised, explain the reasons for the outcome and, where appropriate, identify any action the College will take in response.

4.4. Where, during consideration at Stage 1, it becomes apparent that the complaint requires extensive fact-finding, formal investigation or detailed consideration of disputed evidence, the individual considering the complaint should refer the matter to the Student Casework team.

4.5. The individual considering the complaint should seek to resolve the concerns as early as possible and may contact the student for clarification or invite them to a meeting to discuss the complaint and potential resolution. A meeting may not be necessary where the issues can be adequately considered and resolved from the information provided. Where a meeting is arranged, the student will be given reasonable notice and may be accompanied by a supporting person or representative in accordance with the Student Complaints Policy.

4.6. If a complaint relates to more than one area of the College, the Student Casework team may determine that they should be considered as separate Stage 1 complaints.

4.7. Stage 1 should normally be completed within 20 working days of the complaint being referred to the relevant School, Service or other area.

4.8. Where a student wishes to request further consideration at Stage 2, they may do so **within 15 working days** of the date of the Stage 1 outcome. The request should be directed to casework@rca.ac.uk and explain why the student considers that the matter has not been adequately resolved.

4.9. The Student Casework team will assess the request to determine whether it is appropriate for Stage 2 consideration, taking account of the Stage 1 outcome and the reasons given by the student. Where the request is accepted, the complaint will proceed to Stage 2

5. Stage 2: Formal Complaint

5.1. Stage 2 is the formal investigation stage of the Student Complaints Procedure. A complaint will normally be considered at Stage 2 where, following initial assessment, the Student Casework team determines that formal investigation is necessary.

5.2. Stage 2 will not normally be used to provide a further opportunity to reconsider matters that have already been appropriately considered and resolved at Stage 1. The Student Casework team will determine the appropriate scope of any Stage 2 consideration having regard to the concerns raised, the Stage 1 outcome where applicable, and the reasons provided for requesting further consideration.

Investigating the Complaint

5.3. The Student Casework team will determine how the Stage 2 complaint should be investigated, taking account of the nature, complexity and seriousness of the matters raised and any actual or perceived conflict of interest. The Student Casework team may consider the complaint directly where it can be fairly determined from readily available documentary evidence, or appoint an Investigating Officer where additional or specialist expertise is appropriate.

5.4. Where an Investigating Officer is required, the Student Casework team will seek to identify and appoint an appropriate person as promptly as reasonably practicable, having regard to the need to ensure appropriate independence, seniority and expertise. The student will be kept informed of the progress of the complaint and any significant delay in appointing an Investigating Officer.

5.5. Where an Investigating Officer is appointed, they should have sufficient knowledge, experience and authority to conduct the investigation fairly and reach an appropriate outcome.

5.6. The investigator may invite the student to a meeting where this would assist in understanding or investigating the complaint. A meeting will not be required in every case and may not be necessary where the issues can be fairly considered from the information available. Where a meeting is required, the student will be given reasonable notice of the meeting and may be accompanied by a representative in accordance with the Student Complaints Policy.

5.7. The College may also meet with other individuals where this is reasonably necessary to establish the relevant facts.

5.8. Stage 2 should normally be completed within 25 working days of the Student Casework team commencing consideration of the complaint or, where an Investigating Officer is appointed, of the investigator being appointed. This timeframe includes the investigation and issue of the written outcome to the student.

5.9. Where consideration of a complaint is likely to take longer than 25 working days, the student will be informed of the reason for the delay and, where possible, provided with an updated indication of when a response is expected.

Outcome

5.10. Following completion of the investigation, the Student Casework team will issue a written outcome to the student on behalf of the appropriate decision-maker.

5.11. The written outcome will:

- address the substantive concerns raised by the student;
- set out the findings reached in relation to those concerns;
- explain the reasons for those findings, with reference to the relevant information available;
- identify whether each substantive aspect of the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- where appropriate, explain any remedy, corrective action or other action the College will take; and
- explain the student's right to request an Institutional Review under Stage 3, including the applicable grounds and timeframe.

5.12. Where a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, the College will consider an appropriate and proportionate remedy, corrective action or other action the College will take and, where relevant, how and when it will be implemented.

6. Stage 3: Institutional Review

6.1. Stage 3 provides an opportunity for a student to request a review of the Stage 2 outcome where they remain dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been considered or with the outcome reached.

6.2. A Stage 3 review is not a further investigation or rehearing of the complaint. The purpose of the review is to consider whether the complaint was properly considered at Stage 2 and whether the outcome was reasonable in light of the information available.

6.3. A Stage 3 review may be requested on one or more of the following grounds:

- There was a significant failure to follow the Stage 2 process which may have materially affected the consideration or outcome of the complaint;
- New relevant information or evidence has become available which, for good reason, could not reasonably have been provided at Stage 2 and which may have materially affected the outcome;
- The Stage 2 outcome was not reasonable or proportionate in light of the information available; or
- There is evidence of actual or perceived bias, conflict of interest or lack of appropriate independence in the Stage 2 consideration which may have materially affected the outcome.

6.4. A student may request a review on one or more of these grounds by submitting a Stage 3 Review Form **within 15 working days** of the date of the Stage 2 outcome. The request should explain the grounds on which the student is requesting a review.

6.5. The Student Casework team may accept a request submitted outside the timeframe where there is a reasonable explanation for the delay and it is fair and reasonable to do so, having considered the circumstances of the case.

6.6. The Student Casework team will assess whether the request identifies a valid ground for review. A request which does not identify a valid ground may be rejected. Where a request is rejected, the student will be informed of the reasons and issued with a Completion of Procedures Letter.

6.7. Where a request is accepted, the Academic Registrar will normally conduct the Stage 3 review. Where the Academic Registrar is unable to do so because of a conflict of interest or previous involvement, an appropriately senior and independent member of staff will be appointed to conduct the review.

6.8. The reviewer will consider the Stage 2 consideration and outcome in light of the grounds raised by the student. The reviewer may seek further information or clarification where necessary to determine the review, but will not usually reinvestigate the complaint.

6.9. A Stage 3 review should normally be completed within 15 working days of the review request being accepted. Where this is not possible, the student will be informed of the reason for the delay and, where possible, provided with an updated indication of when the review outcome is expected.

6.10. The Stage 3 outcome will explain the grounds considered, the findings reached, the reasons for those findings and any action to be taken as a result of the review. The review may confirm the Stage 2 outcome, identify a procedural failing in the Stage 2 process, refer the complaint back to Stage 2 for further investigation or reconsideration, or require other appropriate corrective action.

6.11. The Stage 3 outcome will confirm that the College's internal Student Complaints Procedure has been completed and will be accompanied by a Completion of Procedures Letter.

7. Completion of Procedures and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)

7.1. The College will issue a Completion of Procedures Letter where:

- A Stage 3 Institutional Review has concluded;
- A Stage 3 Institutional Review is not accepted for consideration because it falls outside of the scope of this Procedure or does not meet the admissibility requirement; or

- The College has otherwise reached the end of its internal Complaints Procedure.

7.2. Students who remain dissatisfied may submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The Completion of Procedures Letter will explain how to do this as well as the applicable timescales.