

## Student Complaints Procedures

Student complaints procedure for the programmes offered in partnership with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

DEFINITIONS: Please note that for the above-mentioned programmes, the concept of 'appeal' is distinguished from that of 'complaint'. Whilst appeal will relate to academic matters, mainly academic decision on the basis of evidence and procedure and not on the basis of the academic decision, the complaint will relate to any dissatisfaction about matters that affect the quality of the student's learning experience opportunity, including assessment-related matters or about a standard of service provided by the College.

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 We aim to offer students the best possible educational experience and opportunity while at the College and seek to improve continuously the quality of the services we provide. We hope students never need to complain. However, should students encounter an academic problem and have reason to make complaints to the College; this procedure provides general information about how to make your complaint and who to approach if you should decide to complain. It should be used as a starting point and act as a sign-post to more detailed information about successfully resolving problems while studying at Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education.
- 1.2 The College values any feedback, including complaints, as this helps to inform quality improvements.
- 1.3 The object of this procedure is to ensure that complaints made by students are treated seriously and, if found to be valid, are acted upon quickly, simply and fairly at the earliest possible stage to ensure that the students' interests are protected as far as it is possible for the College to do so.
- 1.4 The College will deal courteously and promptly with student complaints at all times. The procedure applies to all registered students of the Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education in conjunction with SQA. Alternative provisions will be made if the student is at a distance from the campus.
- 1.5 Anonymous complaints will be considered, however further action will depend on the volume and reliance of the information given, the nature of the complaint, and the practicalities of progressing it further.

- 1.6 The internal regulations of the College and their associated policies and guidance will be operated in accordance with its Equal Opportunities Policy. Complaints will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality. There is an expectation that students and staff members will treat both the complaints processes and each other with respect.
- 1.7 Students will not be treated less favourably by the College or suffer any disadvantage if they makes a complaint in a good faith, regardless of the result.
- 1.8 Any member of staff mentioned in a complaint will not be treated less favourably by the College if the complaint had not been brought. If, however, the complaint against a member of staff is upheld, that member may be subject to disciplinary proceedings under College's policy for staff.
- 1.9 Investigations will be conducted by a member of staff who is independent of the situation, and will be confidential.
- 1.10 Complaints will be dealt with in a timely fashion. Those involved in investigating the complaint will establish appropriate timescales based on its nature and complexity. These timescales should be communicated to the student and the student kept informed of any changes.
- 1.11 Students cannot complain against matters of academic judgement. Robust mechanisms exist within the College to ensure that marking standards are fair and appropriate. If students wish to challenge assessment decisions, the College's appeals procedure should be used. The College defines "academic judgement" as the professional and scholarly knowledge and expertise which members of staff draw upon in reaching an academic decision. You cannot submit a complaint simply because you believe you should have been awarded a better mark.
- 1.12 If further independent advice and support is needed, students/staff may seek advice from Citizens Advice Scotland or from SQA.

## **2. Complaints Procedure stages**

### **Stage 1: Informal stage**

We aim to ensure that complaints made by students are treated seriously and, if found to be valid, are acted upon quickly, simply and fairly at the earliest possible stage to ensure that the students' interests are protected as far as it is possible for the College to do so. The College will

deal courteously and promptly with student Complaints at all times.

- Students wishing to make a complaint should normally try to resolve this informally with the member of staff concerned.
- Or students may raise the complaint informally with Student Administrator, Unit Coordinator or Programme Co-ordinator.
- If the student feels unable to raise the issue directly with any of these individuals, then they can arrange to speak to one of the officers of the Al-Maktoum College Student Society who can provide the student with impartial advice.
  - These officers may also represent the student should they choose to make a formal complaint.
  - The College will accept complaints brought by third parties, as long as the individual affected has given their personal consent under the requirements of the Data Protection Act. This usually means that the individual affected must give clear written authority for the third party to act on their behalf.

Staff will be informed if a complaint has been made against them/their work, and be given full details of this. Appropriate support will be made available to any member of staff who is involved in the complaint. Such support may come from a line manager, colleague, or Human Resources and will be determined in relation to the nature of the complaint.

It is anticipated that the vast majority of complaints should be resolved at this stage. Where possible, the investigation should be completed within 5 working days.

## **Stage 2: First Formal stage**

If a student's complaint cannot be resolved informally, then it must be made:

- in writing formally to the SQA Coordinator, conveying the nature of the complaint within 5 working days of being unable to resolve the matter informally. Where possible, the student should also indicate the remedy sought.
- Complaints must be signed by the student(s) concerned and will not be accepted if signed by a third party unless, for example, a student has asked a Student Society officer to represent them.
- A meeting will be arranged with the student within 10 working days to discuss the matter and attempt to resolve it.
- At such a meeting the student may be accompanied by a friend or other adviser, who

may include the President of the Al-Maktoum College Student Society or their nominee.

- A copy of the proceedings of the meeting will be sent to the student who has submitted the complaint (via the e-mail and the post).
- The SQA Coordinator may ask for help from one or two members of staff at this stage.
- The outcome of this meeting will be provided in writing within 3 working days.

### **Stage 3: Second Formal stage**

If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, then they should state this:

- In writing to the Principal's Office and ask for a meeting with the Principal.
- A meeting will be arranged with the student within 6 working days to discuss the matter and attempt to resolve it.
- At such a meeting the student may be accompanied by a friend or other adviser. This may include the President of the Al-Maktoum College Student Society or their nominee.
- A copy of the proceedings of the meeting will be sent to the student who has submitted the Complaint (via the e-mail and the post). The Principal may ask for help from the Registrar or a member of the academic staff at this stage.
- The outcome of this meeting will be provided in writing within 3 working days.

### **Stage 4: Third Formal stage**

If the student still remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint then they should:

- Write to the Principal's Office requesting that it be referred to the Academic Council.
- The Council will normally establish a sub-group of members who will meet with the student to hear the complaint.
- At such a meeting the student may be accompanied by a friend or other adviser. This may include the President of the Al-Maktoum College Student Society or their nominee.
- This will normally be the final stage of the complaints procedure.

## **4. Issues affecting a number of students**

Where the complaint is shared by several students then the matter should be raised collectively as a group and the procedures followed as outlined above.

- If the students are submitting a letter under one of the formal stages of the procedure, then the letter should be signed by all of the complainants.
- At any meeting which takes place to discuss the complaint, the group may select up to three of its members as spokesperson(s) to represent them in the discussions. The selection must be communicated in writing with the College by all members of the group.
- Where the College receives a number of individual complaints from students which we feel would be better dealt with collectively, we may decide to consider those complaints on a collective basis and will inform the students accordingly.
- The outcome of the complaint will be communicated to all members of the group.

## **5. Timescales and outcomes**

It is expected that any complaint should be submitted within sensible time limit. If there is any unreasonable delay in submitting a complaint, the College will seek to establish the grounds for such a delay, and act accordingly.

- We will acknowledge receipt of complaints and will normally arrange to meet with the student/s concerned within 10 working days of the date of receipt.
- Where this is not possible, for example where the College has to carry out further investigations or gather additional evidence, we will ensure that the student is kept aware of the current position and of when a meeting is likely to take place.
- Students will be notified of the outcome of the complaint in writing at the end of each Formal Stage.
- After each formal stage, we normally aim to respond within 3 working days of having met the student/s.

## **6. What to do if you remain dissatisfied**

Candidates of SQA Qualifications also have the right to complain to SQA Awarding Body. SQA will only consider your complaint if you have already gone through all stages of the College's procedures and remain dissatisfied with the outcome, or the way in which we handled your complaint.

SQA will deal with complaints about:

- Assessment, in the broadest sense – including the conduct of, preparation for, and environment for assessment.

- Dissatisfaction with the way in which the College handled your complaint.

SQA will not deal with complaints about:

- Assessment decisions
- The wider experience of being a candidate (e.g. support services, funding, facilities etc.)

## **7. Storage and Processing of Complaints Information**

Applicants lodging a complaint and those against whom complaints are made can expect complaints to be dealt with confidentially and with due regard for their privacy. It may be disclosed to those members of the College who have a need to see it in order to investigate the complaint. This disclosure will be undertaken solely to expedite the thorough investigation of the complaint and will not be undertaken to disadvantage any party.

- The personalised record of the complaint and any supporting papers will be destroyed five years following resolution of the case.
- Anonymised data may be kept longer in order to facilitate monitoring and review of the College's admissions process.

## **Dissemination**

The most up-to-date version of these procedures is made available on the College's website and in the Student Handbook. They will also be available upon request from the Student Administration Office, and referred to during the Induction Day, SQA Coordinator and Student Society will also be point of contact if student(s) have complaints against assessment in the broadest sense.