

KING'S INNS

Learner Complaints Procedure

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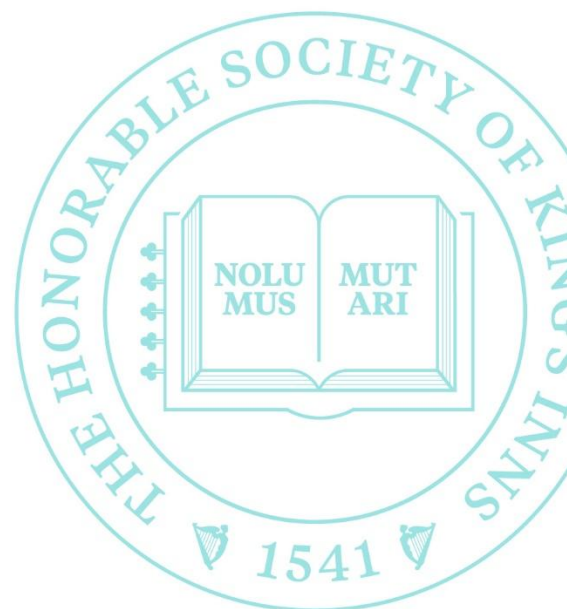
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1. Introduction

The Honorable Society of King's Inns (King's Inns) is committed to providing an excellent education for learners. King's Inns continuously seeks to improve the learner experience. From time-to-time problems may arise and learners should be supported in expressing their dissatisfaction and seeking resolution to the problems encountered. King's Inns takes legitimate learner complaints seriously and aims to resolve them in a clear, fair and timely manner with an emphasis on local resolution where possible. King's Inns endeavours to improve its processes and services by listening to, responding to, recording and resolving learner dissatisfaction.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the formal Learner Complaints Procedure is to ensure that legitimate learner complaints are investigated in a transparent, fair and timely manner with a view to reaching a resolution in a clear, fair and timely manner.

The guiding principles are:

- (1) To recognise the right of learners to complain in the event that they feel they have been mistreated or disadvantaged as a result of the King's Inns provision of programmes, facilities or services, or the actions of member/s of King's Inns staff
- (2) To provide learners with a clear framework in which to raise complaints;
- (3) To respect all the individuals involved in a complaint
- (4) To comply with legal and statutory frameworks
- (5) To support improvements through regular reporting and review of issues raised.

3. Definitions

For the purposes of these procedures:

A **"learner"** is a person who is currently enrolled in a King's Inns programme and whose fee payments are up to date.

"King's Inns staff" includes teaching staff. "King's Inns staff" also includes administrative, library, IT and support staff, including staff contracted to provide services on behalf of King's Inns.

A **complaint** is considered to be an expression of significant or sustained dissatisfaction where an enrolled learner seeks a specific action to address the issue.

4. Scope

The Learner Complaints Procedure applies to learners currently enrolled in a King's Inns programme, in their capacity as learners who are in receipt of educational services from King's Inns. This procedure applies to all education programmes provided at King's Inns. This procedure is not intended to replace the Student Code of Conduct, which applies where a learner wishes to make a complaint that another learner has breached that Code; nor does it apply to decisions relating to academic performance or progression. Separate policies and procedures exist for those circumstances.

5. Learner feedback

King's Inns aims to identify and quickly resolve any difficulties which may be experienced by a learner or a cohort of learners during their programme of study. Ongoing feedback, whether formal or informal, is actively sought throughout the year by a number of means. Amongst the methods of feedback available to learners are (see Learner Feedback Policy):

- Mid-Programme Feedback: On longer programmes, there will be surveys to evaluate satisfaction during the programme and make necessary adjustments.
- End of Programme Surveys: Annual reviews assessing overall learner experiences, facilities, and support services.
- Focus Groups and Interviews: Qualitative feedback sessions providing detailed insights.
- Class Representatives: Feedback relayed via elected class representatives.
- Learner Representatives on Governance Bodies: Contributions from learner representatives to the School of Law Faculty Board.

King's Inns accepts that circumstances may lead to the necessity for a learner to invoke this Learner Complaints Procedure, however, we hope that learners will first avail of one of the means of articulating feedback identified above to ensure that any issue arising can be dealt with at source and at the most beneficial time.

In the exceptional event that an issue remains unresolved after a learner has given feedback using one of the methods above, the Learner Complaints Procedure describes how learners can bring on-going matters of concern about their learning experience to the attention of King's Inns. This procedure aims to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved, with informal resolution an option at any point.

6. Complaints

6.1 Complainants

The procedure applies to complaints from:

- (1) Any registered learner of King's Inns
- (2) Those interacting with King's Inns in activities such as admissions and conferring ceremonies
- (3) A complaint may be made by a learner, by a group of learners or be channelled through an elected learner representative e.g. class representative or learner representative.

Anonymous complaints will not be considered.

6.2 Procedure

6.2.1 Informal resolution

Generally, complaints are resolved more easily and effectively at an early stage and by those who have a direct influence on the situation. In the first instance, learners should seek the advice of their Personal Tutor (Diploma in Legal Studies and Barrister-at-Law Degree Learners) or Programme Coordinator (Advanced Diploma Learners) and use existing informal

mechanisms to resolve difficulties – for example, discussing with individual lecturers or support staff, engaging with class representatives or through staff-learner meetings. The formal learner complaints procedure is available when informal approaches have not produced a satisfactory resolution within a reasonable timeframe or when the seriousness of the complaint merits it.

6.2.2 Formal Complaints Procedure

- Learners should understand that when they make a complaint certain procedures will follow and complainants must be clear on the grounds for their complaint. They are required to provide full and accurate information and to cooperate with the investigation, including providing any additional information requested
- Where a complaint is deemed to be malicious or vexatious or where false information is submitted, disciplinary action may be taken against the complainant
- King's Inns seeks to handle all complaints with discretion. It is important that all parties involved take care to ensure that confidentiality is respected. As far as is practicable, confidentiality will be preserved at all stages in the procedure, in the interests of both the learner making the complaint and the individual members of staff involved
- A learner making a complaint will not be discriminated against or suffer any recrimination as a result of making a legitimate complaint
- Where a complaint involves an individual member of staff that member of staff has a right to respond as part of the investigation
- A member of staff who is the subject of an alleged complaint will not be discriminated against or suffer any recrimination as a result of any unsubstantiated complaint being made.
- All information received and considered as part of the investigation of a complaint will be retained for record purposes in keeping with the King's Inns Records Management and Data Protection Policies.

6.2.3 Stage 1 of the Process

- Formal complaints should normally be made within one month of the last related incident occurring.
- The complaint will first be assessed by the Learner Complaints Officer, who will be nominated by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), to confirm that it falls within the remit of the Learner Complaints Procedure and check that local or informal processes have been exhausted before the formal complaint process is initiated.
- The learner will receive acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint and be informed of the next steps and, where appropriate, the timescale (see below).
- If the complaint is to be investigated, it will be forwarded to the relevant member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) whose area of responsibility the complaint relates to. He or she will investigate the complaint or designate an experienced member of staff from the area who is not implicated in any way in the complaint and does not have a close relationship with any of the parties involved. Should the complaint refer to an individual, that person should be informed at this stage of the complaint. The investigation will examine the issues raised in the complaint and will seek to establish: (1) the nature and circumstances of the complaint; (2) whether the complaint has a merit; (3) what actions (if any) are needed to resolve the issue.
- As part of this investigation, interviews may be conducted with the complainant, those against which the complaint is made and any relevant third party. The learner

complainant may be accompanied by his/her Personal Tutor (if applicable) or by another learner. Any staff member may be accompanied by a King's Inns colleague of their choice. A written report will be prepared recommending measures to be taken to resolve the complaint to the parties concerned. Once approved by the relevant member of the SMT, a copy of the report will be sent to the complainant by the Learner Complaints Officer. This will set out the outcome of the investigation and ask the learner to respond to the outcome of the investigation within 15 working days.

Table 1: Stage 1 Process

<p>Maximum timescale:</p> <p>Six weeks from receipt of complaint to provision of written report with a progress report being issued to the complainant within three weeks.</p>
<p>Possible outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) A mutually acceptable outcome is reached (2) A mutually acceptable outcome is not reached but the Senior Manager considers that the complaint has been heard fairly and that the appropriate actions have been taken. (3) The learner appeals the outcome to Stage 2 on one of the relevant grounds (see section 6.2.4)

6.2.4 Stage 2 of the Process

- A learner may appeal the outcome of Stage 1 if they have reason to believe that
 - the written report does not address the substantive areas of the complaint
 - there is a procedural irregularity in connection with the conduct of the investigation.
- The CEO will chair an Appeals Committee (of no more than three members) comprised of managers or senior staff that had no involvement in Stage 1 of the complaint procedure, to consider the appeal.
- The Appeals Committee will be provided with a written report outlining the handling of the investigation to date, appeal documentation from the learner and will gather other evidence as may be necessary. It may interview the learner and others involved as necessary. The learner complainant may be accompanied by his/her Personal Tutor (if applicable) or by another learner. Any staff member may be accompanied by a King's Inns colleague. The role of the committee is to establish whether the investigation has correctly and properly addressed the substantive areas of the complaint, followed correct procedures and examined all the evidence.
- The learner will be provided with the report of the committee within three weeks of requesting an appeal and will be asked to respond within 15 working days.

Table 2: Stage 2 Process

<p>Maximum timescale:</p> <p>Three weeks from receipt of request for review</p>

Possible outcomes:

- (1) The complaint is deemed to have been handled appropriately. No further action is necessary
- (2) Complaint is referred back to the relevant member of the SMT for further action and/or investigation which results in a mutually acceptable outcome and the problem is resolved.

7. Reporting

An important objective of the formal Learner Complaints Procedure is to support improvements through regular reporting of issues raised. Accordingly, the SMT will be provided with regular reports on the number of learner complaints received, the speed with which they have been dealt with, the areas they cover and what actions have been taken to resolve the complaints and ensure they do not reoccur.

8. Record Management

All information received and considered as part of the investigation of a complaint will be retained in keeping with King's Inns Record Retention Policy.

9. Roles and Responsibility

The CEO is responsible for the oversight of this Procedure.

10. Monitoring and Review

The CEO is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the procedure, ensuring that all associated documents are updated and current, and that the procedure is reviewed as required.

The procedure will be reviewed every three years from the date of first approval unless changes are required owing to legal, statutory and/or organisational change.

All changes to policies or procedures are approved by Council on the recommendation of Standing Committee. Policies and procedures relating to the School of Law will be reviewed in the first instance by the Education Committee before being recommended to Standing Committee

11. Associated Documents

- Learner Complaints Form

12. Referenced Policies

- Data Protection Policy