Name of Policy: Complaints Policy

RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE: General Purposes Committee
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: Principal Bursar
LINKED DOCUMENTS: College: Harassment Policy, Bribery and Fraud, Disciplinary Policies for staff and students (Staff Handbook and Student Handbooks), Data Protection, Freedom of Speech
LINKED DOCUMENTS: Other: University Policies
Annual Review date: First meeting of Hilary Term

Introduction

1. St John's College is committed to fostering a sense of community in which the rights and dignity of all its staff, students and visitors are respected.

2. The College welcomes feedback, whether positive or negative, and considers this to be a valuable source of information that will contribute to the College's continuous improvement of its services.

3. The information provided in this policy offers guidance to students, staff, visitors and members of the public on how to raise a concern or make a complaint with the College.

4. This policy does not cover complaints that are dealt with under separate College and Oxford University procedures listed below:
   - Academic matters or appeals, such as teaching or failure to fulfil academic requirements – these are a matter for academic disciplinary and student appeal processes, refer to the Undergraduate and Graduate Student Handbooks on the College website. The Senior Tutor is the person to approach on academic complaints.
   - Admissions – refer to Undergraduate Admissions Feedback, Complaints and Appeals procedure and Graduate Admissions complaints.
   - Behaviour or incidents by members of staff, students or visitors that may include bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation - refer to Harassment or Prevention of sexual harassment policy on the College website.
   - Behaviour of other students or staff – refer to the Student Disciplinary Code in the Student Handbooks on the College website and the staff disciplinary procedure in the Staff Handbook
   - Bribery and Fraud - refer to Bribery and Fraud Policy on the College website.
   - University administrative, academic (e.g. departmental teaching) and support services (e.g. departmental or central facilities) – refer to Education and Student Support - Academic appeals, complaints and conduct
   - Bainton Road Nursery – refer to the Nursery's Policies
   - Commercial lettings and property management – refer to our property agents Savills procedures

- Data protection – refer to the Data Protection Policy on the College website

5. This Policy and Procedure will be subject to annual review by General Purpose Committee each Hilary Term.

General Principles

6. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially by all parties involved, except where it is necessary to disclose information to carry out a fair investigation.

7. All parties involved in a complaint are required to act reasonably and fairly towards each other and to respect the College's procedures.

8. A complaint should be made as soon as the matter arises and, under normal circumstances, no later than three months after the event occurred.

9. All complaints will be dealt with promptly. The College endeavours to respond to a complaint within 10 working days. Any person asked to investigate a complaint is responsible for taking prompt action and in accordance with the expected response standard of 10 working days.

10. Anonymous complainants or complaints made on behalf of someone else will not be considered, unless there is a compelling reason to do so; such reasons should be clearly stated.

11. Malicious or vexatious allegations may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the College's disciplinary procedures for staff and students. Disciplinary actions may also be taken against anyone who victimises or retaliates against a student, member of staff or visitor who brings a complaint in good faith.

12. The College may decline to consider a complaint where the matters in dispute are currently being considered or have been decided by an external body (e.g. the OIA, OfS or a court or tribunal).

13. No one investigating a complaint should have any conflict of interest in the matter.

Procedure

14. Complaints may be made in a variety of ways, e.g. telephone, written, visit.

15. The person making a complaint must provide the following:
    - Name and contact details (postal address, telephone number, email address) - unless there is a compelling reason for remaining anonymous;
    - Date(s) and location(s) when the matter occurred;
    - Details of the complaint;

- If known, whether the complaint is against a member of staff, student, visitor, or in relation to a particular service.

16. Anyone can send a message to raise a concern or complaint to the confidential email feedback@sjc.ox.ac.uk, to which only the Principal Bursar and Bursary Manager have access.
    Alternatively, you may write to Principal Bursar, St John's College, St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3JP or telephone: 01865-277321.
    If the complaint is about the Principal Bursar or their office, the complaint should be sent to the President (president@sjc.ox.ac.uk) or telephone: 01865- 277419

17. The Principal Bursar will either personally look into the complaint, refer it to an appropriate office holder under the informal procedure or proceed to a formal investigation.

18. There are three possible stages under which a complaint can be made:
    - Stage 1 – an informal stage where a local informal resolution is sought;
    - Stage 2 – a formal stage where the complaint is made formally and investigated by a senior person in College;
    - Stage 3 – a review/ appeal if the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the formal proceedings.

How each stage works

Stage 1 – Informal stage

19. A stage 1 complaint involves raising awareness of the issue at the earliest opportunity, either in writing or verbally. Under the informal procedure, College members are asked to raise their complaint with the relevant College office holder in the first instance. Starting with the informal route is often the quickest and most flexible way of resolving problems. A number of office holders can be approached:
    - For academic and Academic Office matters: Senior Tutor
    - For issues involving domestic College staff or services (e.g. catering, accommodation, security, conferences and events): Domestic Bursar
    - For financial matters and student battels: Finance Bursar
    - For matters pertaining to the Library: Head of Library and Archives
    - For matters involving Works staff and College maintenance works: Works Bursar
    - For matters pertaining to the Development & Alumni Relations Office: Director of Development & Alumni Relations
    - For matters pertaining to the Access Office: Fellow for Access
    - For matters pertaining to Admissions: Senior Tutor
    - For computing matters: IT Manager
    - For matters pertaining to sports facilities: Domestic Bursar
    - For matters pertaining to the Chapel: Chaplain

- For complaints about students' disciplinary or behavioural matters: Senior Dean
- For complaints about matters pertaining to professional staff: Principal Bursar
- For complaints about matters pertaining to academic staff: Provost for Academic Affairs or President
- For complaints about a College Officer, including the President: the President or the Vice President or Provost for Academic Affairs if the complaint is about the President
- For complaints pertaining to Freedom of Speech: Senior Tutor

20. In case of doubt about the appropriate office holder, the Principal Bursar will advise.

21. Visitors or members of the public should address an informal complaint to the Principal Bursar (or the President if the complaint is about the Principal Bursar).

22. To resolve the complaint, the relevant Officer will normally arrange a meeting with the complainant, seek to offer advice, talk to both or more parties involved, reach a conclusion, suggest steps to be taken to resolve the issue, and record the outcome in a written response to the complainant.

Stage 2 – Formal stage

23. When a complaint cannot be dealt with locally and informally to the satisfaction of the complainant, they may submit a stage 2 (formal) complaint within 10 working days of the date of the outcome of stage 1.

24. All formal complaints should be sent in writing to the Principal Bursar, the Vice President or Provost for Academic Affairs if the complaint is about the President or the President if the complaint is about the Principal Bursar.

25. Matters of concern should be raised at the earliest opportunity and no later than three months after the occasion for the complaint. A complainant seeking to bring a complaint outside the normal three-month period must include with their formal complaint the reason(s) for the delay.

26. A formal complaint should include:
    - An account of what has given rise to the complaint, together with dates and names (if known) or services involved;
    - The details and outcome of the informal procedure already pursued by the complainant, or an explanation why the informal route was not pursued in this case.

27. Within 10 working days of receiving a formal complaint, the Principal Bursar (or Vice President, Provost for Academic Affairs, or President) will inform the complainant whether or not the complaint is being taken forward and who will

be assigned to undertake the investigation and respond to it. Any subject of the complaint will be entitled to receive a copy of the complaint.

28. If the complaint is not taken forward, the complainant will receive a written explanation as to the reason(s).

29. The investigator will speak to the complainant, the person(s) against whom the complaint is made (or review the service offering), look at evidence, question witnesses, and report back to the responsible office holder.

30. The complainant will receive the outcome report of the investigation from the investigator.

Stage 3 – Appeal / review

31. If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of a stage 2 complaint, they may apply for a review.

32. Such an application must be made in writing to the Principal Bursar (or the Vice President, Provost for Academic Affairs or the President) within 10 working days from the date of the written notification of the stage 2 outcome.

33. The grounds for review must be clearly stated as part of the application and can be one of the following:
    - There was a procedural irregularity;
    - The decision was unreasonable; in that case the complainant will have to identify which aspects of the decision they consider to be objectively unreasonable and explain why; or
    - Relevant new evidence has come to light, which could not reasonably have been produced during an earlier stage.

34. The Principal Bursar (or the Vice President, Provost for Academic Affairs or the President) will decide whether the request for a review is reasonable.

35. If it is determined that the application for review is within the above scope it will be considered by the Principal Bursar (or the Vice President, Provost for Academic Affairs or the President), by a review panel or by an external reviewer. None of the reviewers will have been previously involved in the complaint.

36. The reviewer will only consider the matter on the grounds listed above and will not consider the issues afresh or carry out a further investigation.

37. The reviewer will endeavor to reach a decision within 10 working days of receiving the request for a review. The decision letter will set out the reviewer's decision and the reason(s) for the decision.

38. The decision of the reviewer will be final and concludes the College processes.

Record keeping

39. An anonymised summary of complaints will be kept in the Principal Bursar's office and an annual report is provided to Audit, Risk & Governance Committee.

External bodies following conclusion of College internal procedures

40. Office of the Independent Adjudicator – applies to students only

Should the resolution of the complaint not be to the student's satisfaction following the conclusion of the College's internal procedure, they have the option to take their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education within 12 months of the end of the College's procedures. Note that complaints relating to matters of academic judgement, performance or admissions cannot be dealt with by the OIAHE procedures. Can you complain to us? - OIAHE

41. Office for Students (OfS) for Freedom of Speech related complaints – applies to current or previous staff, applicants for academic posts, visiting speakers (actual or invited) and current or previous non-student members

Should the resolution of a Freedom of Speech complaint not be to the complainant's satisfaction following conclusion of the College's internal procedure, eligible complainants have the option to take their complaint to the OfS. The scheme is free to use. Information about the complaints that the OfS can review is available on the OfS website

POLICY HISTORY

Date of GB approval	*Brief summary of changes*	*Confirmation that linked documents have updated if necessary*	*College policy register updated*
MT 2021	Generation of Policy and adopted by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)
HT 2023	Policy reviewed by GB, no amendments	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)
HT 2024	Policy reviewed by GB, updated Nursery link and College Officer titles	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)
HT 2025	Policy reviewed, added clause 40 on record keeping and reporting; approved by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)
HT 2026	Clause 4: updated University links, added link to Savills' complaints procedure; approved by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)
TT 2026	Clause 4: added data protection complaints; approved by GB	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)
MT 2026	Linked to Freedom of Speech policy; added under clause 19 Freedom of Speech complaints; amended clause 30 to say that outcome will be reported by investigator and deleted subsequent clause; added clause 41 to link to OfS Freedom of Speech complaints scheme	Confirmed	Yes (Iris Burke)