



PLS

Complaints Policy

1.2 Aims of this Policy

The complaints procedure seeks to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary
- respect people's desire for confidentiality
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary

The complaints procedure will also

- be easily accessible and publicised
- be simple to understand and use
- provide information to the PLS management team so that services can be improved

1.2 General Principles

The difference between a Complaint and a Concern

A 'concern' may be defined as '*an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought*'. A complaint may be generally defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action*'.

PLS describes a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction with any service or lack of service provided by PLS. The Complaints Procedure is not restricted to trainees of PLS: it may also be initiated by potential trainees, partner school or members of the public. For a trainee who is currently enrolled in PLS they must see PLS Grievance Policy. A complaint may also be submitted collectively, who should nominate a spokesperson who will be the channel of communication for the group, however, a complaint may not be lodged by a third party on behalf of the complainant.

The majority of issues raised are concerns rather than complaints. PLS is committed to taking concerns seriously, at the earliest stage, in the hope of keeping the number of formal complaints to a minimum and without needing to implement formal procedures. PLS reserves

the right to reject a formal complaint that it considers to be unsubstantiated or frivolous. It is usual to disregard anonymous complaints unless somebody is prepared to substantiate them. However anonymous complaints may be investigated, at the discretion of the Directors, if it is felt the complaint is of sufficient seriousness to warrant this.

For PLS to be able to investigate a complaint, it needs to be made within three months of the incident occurring. If a complaint is older than three months it will not be investigated. The prime aim of the policy is to resolve the complaint as fairly and speedily as possible. Formal complaints will be dealt with in a sensitive, impartial and confidential manner.

1.3 How to make a complaint

A concern must be made in writing. Concerns should be raised with either

- The PCM
- The PLS Tutor
- One of the Directors

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint to either the Directors or the Strategic board.

If making a formal complaint, this must be made in writing to ensure clarity of the complaint to all parties.

Complainants should not approach individual strategic members to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against PLS staff (except the Directors) should be made in the first instance, to the Co Directors, via the PLS address. Please mark it as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Directors should be addressed to the Chair of the Strategic board, via the PLS address. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Strategic board, any individual member or the whole strategic board should be addressed to both Ms Nicola Dominique and Ms Jenny Wake (the Clerks to the Strategic board) via the PLS address. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Dealing with Complaints - Initial concerns

PLS distinguishes between a concern and a complaint. By taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage we endeavour to keep the numbers that develop into formal complaints to a minimum.

This document deals with complaints but the underlying principle is that concerns ought to be handled, if at all possible, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure should not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases the individual concerned will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if PLS were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary. Where appropriate, some complaints may be made to the Directors directly.

Time-Limits

A complainant should be able to expect to have a response, even if not the final response, to their complaint within **five working days** of having made the complaint or concern.

The response may initially be a phone call. Many concerns are resolved at this stage. Where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant will be informed of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay. Further contact may be in writing or at a meeting with written confirmation of the outcome.

3 Procedure

3.1 The Stages of Complaints

The Formal Complaints Procedure has a two based stages:

- Stage one: complaint heard by the Directors
- Stage two: complaint heard by the Strategic Board

3.2 Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Directors (unless they are about the Directors), via the PLS address. This must be done in writing preferably on the Complaint Form.

The Directors will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **five working days** days.

Within this response, the Directors will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Directors can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Directors may delegate the investigation to another member of the PLS management team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, investigator will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the investigator will provide a formal written response within **five school days** of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the investigator is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions that PLS will take to resolve the complaint.

The investigator will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Directors, or a member of the Strategic body will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Directors or member of the Strategic body must be made to the Clerk, via the PLS address.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Strategic body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Strategic board . At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

3.2 Stage Two: Complaint heard by the Strategic Board

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the Strategic board complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, strategic members available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the PLS address, within **five working days** of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the

complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within **three working days**.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within no more than 15 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three members of the Strategic board with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three board members available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent member through another partner school in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if an employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 3 working days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible

The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, any new information not already presented in stage 1 of the investigation relating to the original complaint.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the PLS systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and the school with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 working days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the school.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair
- the entire Strategic board or
- the majority of the Strategic body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted members.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions the school will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

4 General Principles underlying the Complaints Procedure

4.1 PLS Complaints Procedure recognises the importance of the protection of the rights of those wrongly accused. Malicious or frivolous accusations will be viewed as a serious

matter by PLS.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator

Should the appellant wish to take the matter further we suggest they contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

The [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](http://www.oiahe.org.uk) ('OIA') is an independent body set up to review student complaints. It is free to students and deals with individual complaints against Higher Education Institutions in England and Wales.

When all internal procedures are complete, students may request an independent review of their case by the OIA, if they remain dissatisfied with the final outcome from PLS. Provided the complaint is eligible under the rules of the OIA's complaints scheme, the OIA will look at whether PLS applied its regulations properly and followed its procedures correctly.

WEB SITE: <http://www.oiahe.org.uk>

OIA, Second Floor, Abbey Gate, 57-75 Kings Road, Reading, RG1 3AB

Telephone: 0118 959 9813

Appendix 1:

Complaint Form

To be completed by the person who wishes to make a complaint

To: PLS co director (or chair of Strategic Board if PLS co director involved)

FROM:

TITLE:

Give below details of the complaint including dates of the incident/issue:

The expected outcome:

Signed:

Date: