

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Mary Ward Centre's prime concern is that any person dealing with the Centre should have an efficient, courteous and helpful encounter. Likewise any user of our services has a right to expect quality in that service and value for money.

A complaint would be defined as the sharing of a negative experience by a member of the public or user of the Centre's services which in their opinion was as a result of the Centre's failure to meet an expected level of efficiency, courtesy, helpfulness or quality.

The Centre takes complaints seriously and encourages its users to bring to the attention of its staff any instance of an unsatisfactory outcome or experience.

This complaints procedure confirms that any complaint will be treated with courtesy, impartiality and in confidence. Complaints can be made in person, in writing, by fax or by telephone. In 2008 we introduced a new additional complaints policy covering admissions to accredited courses, see below.

General Complaints Procedure

To whom do you complain?

We are committed to resolving complaints as quickly as possible.

Normally complaints should be raised on the spot at the point of delivery with any party concerned and be dealt with immediately. If this is not possible and you do not have a named person with whom you wish to raise the matter, the initial person to contact at the above address is the PA to the Principal: Tel 020 7269 6062, Fax 020 7269 6001, email ceri.williams@marywardcentre.ac.uk. If the complaint is about the Principal or her PA, please address complaints to the clerk, sarah-jane.stagg@marywardcentre.ac.uk.

1. Formal Procedure

- 1.1 If the complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved at the point where the cause of complaint occurred, then contact should be made directly with the PA to the Principal. Full details should be given in writing. It would be helpful if a daytime telephone number were given. If help is needed in drafting a written complaint, also contact the Principal's PA who will give you assistance.
- 1.2 Once the complaint has been received you will receive an acknowledgement within seven working days excluding holidays.
- 1.3 If the complaint relates to admission to an accredited course, see procedure below in Section 2

- 1.4 The Principal's PA will have initial authority to investigate your complaint and will seek information from any other party concerned. In the first instance s/he will always inform and involve the relevant manager or Head of Department. On completion of the investigation and if the complaint is found reasonable, s/he will ensure that you receive a courteous apology and any redress that is required. Wherever possible the manager closest to the complaint will respond in the first instance and report directly to the complainant, copying in the Vice Principal – Curriculum and Quality. If your complaint is rejected you can expect the reasons why to be clearly stated. You will also receive a copy of the Complaints Procedure at this point.
- 1.5 If the response received to your complaint is in your opinion unsatisfactory you can request that the matter be passed to the Vice Principal – Curriculum and Quality for her/his consideration.
- 1.6 Likewise, any complaint received which is either more complex or raises more serious issues than can be appropriately dealt with by the Principal's PA, will also be forwarded to the Vice Principal for her/his investigation. The Vice Principal will seek information from all parties concerned and if necessary will seek further clarification from you.
- 1.7 You should expect a response within 21 working days not including holidays following receipt of an acknowledgement. If your complaint is upheld you will receive an apology or any redress due. If your complaint is rejected you can expect full reasons as to why. A copy of the response to you will be copied to the Principal.
- 1.8 If you still feel that the response to your complaint at this stage is not satisfactory you have the right to an appeal to the Principal. You should expect a response within 7 working days, not including holidays.

If you are not satisfied with the response from the Principal, you have the right to a final appeal to the Management Committee. This can be done in writing via the Chair of the Management Committee. The Management Committee has a standing Complaints/Disciplinary Committee comprising the Vice-Chair of the Management Committee, a student member and a staff member.

The Principal and Vice Principal are not members of this Standing Committee and will only appear if requested to provide information. The Standing Committee will act as an independent review body in order to ensure impartiality. In the event of one or more of its members being the subject of a complaint, or being seen to have had an involvement in earlier stages of the complaints procedure, then they will stand down and be replaced by another member or other members of the Management Committee.

The Chair of Mary Ward Centre will be informed immediately an appeal to the Standing Committee is made. This Standing Committee should meet within 15 working days, excluding holidays, of your request and its decision will be final. It will be provided with all correspondence and documentation and can call witnesses if necessary. If your complaint is upheld, the committee will make an appropriate response and recommend to the Management Committee any redress or compensation.

2. Admissions complaint and appeal procedure for accredited courses

2.1 If an applicant has not been accepted for admission to an accredited course of study and is unhappy with this decision, s/he must put the complaint in writing within 14 days to the relevant Head of Department, who will respond in writing to the complainant also normally within 14 days although a longer response time may be required during academic holidays. If, in the opinion of the applicant, the matter has not been satisfactorily resolved at this stage, an appeal may be made. A copy of this complaints procedure will be sent with the Head of Department's response.

2.2 Appeals

2.2.1 An applicant who has not been given a place on an accredited Mary Ward course may appeal either on grounds relevant to the Centre's guidance for admission to accredited courses or on grounds relevant to the specific criteria stated for the particular course. Allegations of discrimination on grounds such as race or gender will also be dealt with under this procedure, with reference to the Centre's Equal Opportunities Policy, a copy of which will be sent to the complainant on request.

2.2.2 An appeal should be made in writing to the Vice Principal - Curriculum and Quality within fourteen days of receiving the response of the Head of Department. In making the appeal, the applicant should set out the ground(s) for appeal, as given above, together with any supporting evidence. The Vice Principal, on behalf of the Principal, will determine whether the appeal meets the criteria stated above.

2.2.3 Where the appeal is allowed to proceed by the Vice Principal, s/he will ask the Head of Department to respond in writing within 14 working days of receiving the request. The response of the Head of Department will be forwarded to the applicant, who will have the opportunity to comment. Comments will normally be required within 14 days of receipt of the response.

2.2.4 On receipt of any comments from the applicant, or after the 14 day period given to reply, the Vice Principal will convene a panel to discuss the written evidence

2.2.5 The Vice Principal will provide the Appeal Panel with a copy of the original appeal and any supporting material submitted by the applicant, the response made by the Head of Department, and any further comments on that response from the applicant.

2.2.6 The Appeal Panel will be constituted as follows:

- The Vice Principal - Curriculum and Quality
- A Head of Department from a department other than that to which the application was made
- The Chair of the Standing Complaints Committee or their nominee (who will chair the Appeal Panel)
- The panel may co-opt an additional member if it feels particular expertise is required, e.g. an academic member of staff or member of the governing body who has subject expertise but has not been involved in the disputed application.

2.2.7 It is expected that the information provided to the Appeal Panel will be sufficient for a recommendation to be reached. However, should the panel deem it necessary, it may invite the applicant or a representative of the Department to be present at the meeting of the Appeal Panel.

2.2.8 The Chair of the Equality Assurance Committee or their representative will advise the Appeal Panel as appropriate and may be invited to attend the meeting of the panel for this purpose.

3. Outcomes

3.1 It shall be open to the Panel to uphold the appeal or to reject it. The Vice Principal - Curriculum and Quality will notify the appellant and the relevant Head of Department of the decision in writing within seven working days of the panel meeting.

3.2 If the appeal is upheld, the Chair of the Panel will write to the Head of Department to which the appellant applied, stating the grounds for the decision, and directing the Department to consider the application again. This does not, however, commit the Department to reversing its initial decision, as there may be other reasons for rejecting the application.

3.3 The outcome of the appeal process will be final and no further appeal will be permitted.

Further appeal on complaints regarding general matters or admission to an accredited course

If you are still unhappy and think the Centre has been unreasonable or is not doing its job properly you can complain, within three months of the Centre concluding its own complaints procedure, to:

London Central Learning and Skills Council
Centrepont
103 Oxford Street
London
WC1A 1DR Tel: 0845 019 4144

The Secretary of State
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)
Kingsgate House
Victoria St
Westminster
London
SW1P Tel: 0870 000 2288

Outcomes

1. The Centre commits itself to addressing all points of issue in any complaint. Redress will be readily available and will be appropriate to the complaint.
2. Appropriate redress will be determined by the Principal, or by the Management Committee following the recommendations of the Complaints/Disciplinary Standing Committee if the matter has been referred to the Complaints Committee.
3. Regrets can be expected to be expressed spontaneously regardless of the nature of the complaint.
4. Apologies/redress will be extended, where appropriate, to others who may have suffered in the same way as a person who complains, but who may not have made a formal complaint.
5. People's levels of satisfaction with the way their complaint was handled and redressed will be monitored.

Using complaints to improve the quality of our service

1. All complaints will be recorded and will provide information to assist the Centre in improving its service. Trends in complaints will be analysed to identify areas where appropriate action is needed.
2. It will be the responsibility of the Principal to monitor the recording system and to provide an annual report to the Centre's Management Committee.
3. Any implications for service delivery will be recorded and circulated to all staff.

4. Handling complaints will be covered in all new staff's induction and will feature in staff training.

Note to Complaints Policy

All references to "working days" in the document above are presumed to refer only to term times.