GODALMING COLLEGE

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURES

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Introduction

The College is committed to providing the best possible educational experience for all its students. The College's aim is to have few or no concerns or complaints, but if they do arise the College will ensure they are dealt with as efficiently and effectively as possible; where justified they will help us to improve the quality of our provision.

Aims

- *Objectivity* those investigating the complaint will consider the views of all concerned and weigh up all relevant evidence carefully. In dealing with concerns and complaints, the College will have regard to promote respect, tolerance and inclusivity for others
- *Effectively* in making changes if and where needed
- *Fairness* If action is required, it will be as appropriate to the nature of the issue, the impact of legislative requirements and in accordance with the general procedures and policies of the College

Scope

This Policy covers all concerns/complaints made by students, parents and carers and other stakeholders, at the discretion of the College

This Policy does not cover:

Area	Relevant Policy/Authority
Admissions - Unsuccessful applications by prospective students	Admissions Policy – this is dealt with via the Admissions Appeal Procedure
Examination matters (including awarding body decisions)	Ofqual/JCQ
Exclusions	Student Behaviour and Support Policy – exclusions are explicitly governed by this and the appeal against exclusion procedure
Data Protection	Data Protection Policy
Staff Grievances	Staff Grievance Policy
Statutory assessment of SEN	Local Authority relevant to the individual student
Matters subject of legal action	N/A
Contractual disputes	N/A

Complaints against staff

Complaints against staff will be dealt with under the College's internal disciplinary procedure, if appropriate. The outcomes of any such disciplinary action will not be shared with any complainants. The complainant will only ever be notified that the matter is being addressed.

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Complaints relating to College Policies

Complaints which solely challenge the existence, content, or approval of a College Policy or procedure, where that policy has been approved and correctly applied, will not be progressed under this procedure.

Whistleblowing

The College has a Whistleblowing Policy for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: Contact the Department for Education (DfE) - GOV.UK

Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous concerns or complaints. However, the relevant member of staff, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation. The College reserves the right not to investigate complaints considered to be vexatious or malicious.

Definitions

The DfE explains the difference between concern and complaint:

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 defined as an 'expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or lack of action.'

These two definitions underpin the College Complaints Policy and Procedures and drive our approach to addressing issues anyone wants to raise. The College wants to resolve issues as quickly and effectively as possible. Wherever possible, it is the expectation that any issue is raised as a 'concern' first, ideally with the person most close to the issue e.g. the teacher/or personal tutor.

Policy Arrangements

Wherever possible the College strives to sort out any concerns/complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible. It is hoped that most issues can be resolved at the Stage One Informal Concern basis.

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the concern/complaint if they:

- follow these procedures
- co-operate with the College in seeking a solution
- respond promptly to requests for information
- treat all those involved with respect
- do not publish details of their concern/complaint in any format (including on social media)

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Timescales

We will consider concerns/complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first College term-time working day after the holiday period.

A concern/complaint must be made as soon as possible and no later than 3 months after the incident arises. The sooner the complaint is raised, the easier it is for the College to investigate it. If the complaint is received within 3 months of the incident but is received during a holiday period, the College will deal with it upon the start of the new term.

Record Keeping

The Principal will keep a log of all Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints. This is to ensure closure is achieved in every case, and the reputation of the College is safeguarded. All correspondence and records relating to concerns/complaints, whether held by the Principal or other relevant staff, will be destroyed after 3 years.

Stage One: Informal Concern

The College will take informal concerns seriously. It is hoped the College will be able to provide reassurance at this stage, which will quickly resolve the matter.

In the first instance, the complainant should raise the issue directly with the relevant member of College staff e.g. the teacher or personal tutor, as soon as possible. This can be done via e-mail, or telephone, or in writing. If the complainant is unclear of who to contact, or how to best to contact the person concerned, they should email college@godalming.ac.uk. This will ensure the concern is passed onto the relevant member of staff.

If the complainant doesn't feel it is appropriate to raise their concern with the relevant member of College staff directly, or is not satisfied with their initial response, they should send an email to college@godalming.ac.uk or call the main college reception and make sure the following information is provided:

- Name
- Student's name (if relevant)
- Relationship to the student (if relevant)
- Clarity on whether their student knows you are raising a concern? If not, why not?
- Outline of the nature of the concern
- Outline steps it is felt would be appropriate to resolve the concern

The College will acknowledge informal concerns within 5 College working days and investigate and provide a response within 10 College working days. The appropriate member of staff who is addressing the Informal Concern may liaise with the complainant to ensure they have all the key information needed to investigate the concern. They will ensure their response to the concern is provided either via e-mail or telephone.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response at this stage, then it can be escalated to a Formal Complaint.

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Stage Two: Formal Complaint

A Formal Complaint must be put in writing using the Complaint Form (see Appendix A) and include additional details such as relevant dates, times and names of witnesses as well as other relevant documentation. This should be sent to the Principal via slt@godalming.ac.uk.
The College will not normally consider a Formal Complaint unless an Informal Concern (Stage One) has already been exhausted.

The Principal will contact the complainant within 5 College working days to confirm receipt of the complaint. The Principal will assign the most appropriate member of the Upper Management Team to investigate the complaint. The assigned member of the Upper Management Team may seek to further clarify the nature of the complaint if this is not clear on the Complaint Form. They could consider whether a telephone call or face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

During the investigation, the designated investigator will:

- conduct interviews with an open mind
- keep notes of interviews
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- be mindful of the duty of care to all persons concerned. Members of staff who are subject to a complaint will be kept informed, as much as possible, as to how the complaint is progressing. However, there may be limitations on openness and difficult decisions to be made in this regard and HR advice will be sought if applicable

At the conclusion of the investigation, the designated investigator will provide a formal written response within 20 College working days of the date of the receipt of the complaint.
If the College is unable to meet this deadline, the complainant will be provided with an update and a 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 Godalming College will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be informed of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

Complaints against the Principal, or member of the Academy Board, should be made in writing to the Chair of the Academy Trust. A suitably skilled Trustee will be appointed to investigate the complaint as outlined above. If the complaint is about the Chair and Vice Chair or the entire/majority of the Trustee Board then Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Members. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage Three: Panel Hearing

A request to escalate to Stage 3 can be made if the complainant is not satisfied that the complaint has been fully investigated or the procedure has not been followed at Stage 2. The request to escalate must be made to the Clerk of Trustees. They will record the date the

complaint is received and acknowledge receipt in writing (usually via e-mail) within 5 College working days.

Trustees will always ensure that the College has upheld its statutory responsibilities and has upheld and followed its approved policies and procedures. A complaint will not proceed to a panel hearing if the complaint is about the content of an approved policy.

A Complaint Panel will be convened to review the Stage 2 Investigation carried out by the Principal or their delegated alternative. The Panel will consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and will not contain any College staff. It will be comprised of members of the Board of Trustees and at least one of the panel members, where possible, will be entirely independent of the College.

The complainant will be invited to a Panel Hearing, with reasonable notice, however the Panel reserves the right to convene at the convenience of its members rather than that of the complainant.

One of the members of the Panel will be appointed as Panel Chair. The Panel and the complainant will receive all relevant information pertaining to the complaint, including the Stage 2 response.

At the Panel Hearing, the complainant, and representative(s) from the College, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written submissions prior to the meeting. At the Hearing each individual will have the opportunity to give a statement in respect of the complaint. The Panel, the complainant and the College representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and the College Representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave, and evidence will then be considered by the Panel.

After consideration of the case and possible further investigation, the Panel will produce a summary of their decision. Where there is a disagreement within the Panel, a majority view will be taken. The Panel Chair, via the Clerk to the Trustees, will inform the complainant and the College Representative (s) of the Panel decision within 10 College working days after the hearing.

The Panel can:

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

Next Steps

If the complainant believes Godalming College did not handle their complaint in accordance with this Policy and Procedure, or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 3. The Department will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Godalming College. They will consider whether Godalming College has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

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Monitoring and Review

The Principal will produce an annual summary of complaints received at stage 2 and 3, for the Governance and Strategy Committee to review. This summary will report on the number of complaints and categories of complaints in order to monitor the College's working practices and effectiveness of its policies and procedures.

This Policy and Procedure is reviewed every 3 years by the Governance and Strategy Committee.

Approval

Approval Body	Board of Trustees
Date Approved	July 2026
Review Date	July 2029
Policy Owner(s)	Principal

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Appendix A: Complaint Form

Please complete and return to this form to slt@godalming.ac.uk

Your name:
Student's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the student (if relevant):
Does your student/parent (delete as appropriate) know you are making a formal complaint? If not, why not?
Address: Postcode: Telephone Number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including referencing feedback you have already received from the College
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: Date:
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By whom:
Complaint referred to:
Action taken:
Date: