

# **ADMISSIONS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

**UPDATED: OCTOBER 2015**

## Admissions Complaints Procedure

*Central is committed to ensuring that we provide for all our applicants high quality and fair admissions procedures in line with our Admissions Policy. We recognise, however, that there may be occasions when applicants will feel that they have cause for complaint. The Complaints Procedure sets out how applicants may seek to have complaints addressed.*

### General Principles

Applicants have no right of appeal against a decision not to offer them a place at the School. Due to the level of competition for places, there will inevitably be occasions when an applicant disagrees with a selection decision. Providing that the decision can be shown to have been reached fairly and in accordance with the School's published selection criteria, the original decision will not be overturned. However, should an applicant believe that School admissions principles and procedures have been inconsistently or incorrectly applied, these complaints procedures provide a mechanism for objective review for both undergraduate and postgraduate applicants.

It should be recognised that the vast majority of applicant complaints can be handled fairly, amicably, and to the satisfaction of all concerned without recourse to the formal complaints procedure. In the first instance, applicants with a complaint should raise it informally with the Head of Admissions and Student Recruitment. If this course of action proves unsatisfactory, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

Complaints may be made by individual applicants or by groups of applicants; they may not be made by a representative, a parent, a school or any other third party. Exceptions will only ever be considered where a student is unable to represent themselves due to particular and extreme circumstances (e.g.; complete incapacity).

Central will seek to ensure that all complaints are treated seriously and constructively. It will also seek to ensure that complaints are dealt with promptly, with fairness and consistency and with due regard to the School's Equal Opportunities Policy. If a complaint is upheld, the School will take such action or provide such remedy as may be appropriate and will do so promptly. If a complaint is not upheld, the reasons for the decision will be communicated to the applicant.

There will be no discrimination against any applicant who makes a complaint.

Applicants lodging a complaint and those against whom complaints are made may expect complaints to be dealt with confidentially and with respect for their privacy. However, it may be necessary to disclose information to others in order to deal with the complaint and in these circumstances the parties concerned will be informed of such disclosure.

Anonymous complaints will not be dealt with under this procedure. Staff who receive anonymous complaints will be expected to use their discretion and judgment as to how to handle such complaints.

The Complaints Procedure provides for both informal and formal stages in the handling of a complaint. At each stage of the process, the person to whom the complaint has been referred shall, if it is upheld, wholly or in part, apply such remedies as are within their powers. If they consider that the remedy is outside their powers, they shall refer the matter to the appropriate authority. If they feel unable to fulfill the requirements of the Complaints Procedure objectively because of prior involvement in the case, they will refer the matter to a more senior colleague.

The Head of Admissions and Student Recruitment will monitor, on an annual basis, formal complaints which have been referred, and will be responsible for implementing, or recommending to the appropriate authority, changes to systems or procedures suggested by the nature and pattern of the complaints received. The outcome of such monitoring may also inform other processes or activities such as arrangements for interview or standard correspondence with applicants. The Academic Registrar and Director of Academic Services shall receive annually a report on the outcome of the monitoring processes and shall consider in the light of the report whether changes to the School's systems and to the Complaints Procedure itself would be appropriate.

The Complaints Procedure may be invoked by any individual who has submitted a formal application for full-time undergraduate study or full-time or part-time postgraduate study at Central.

Advice about the Complaints Procedure may be obtained from the Head of Admissions and Student Recruitment.

The Complaints Procedure is informed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's Code of Practice for the Assurance of Quality in Recruitment and Admissions, and in particular by precept 9.

## The Process

### Stage one: informal complaint

1. Most complaints can be resolved satisfactorily on an informal basis. The applicant should normally first raise her/his complaint either orally or in writing with the Head of Admissions and Student Recruitment, or the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic Services if the complaint relates to the Head of Admissions and Student Recruitment, outlining the nature and details of her/his complaint.
2. The complaint must normally be made within 15 working days of the actions (or lack of actions) that prompted the complaint. The appropriate staff member shall respond to the complaint normally within 15 working days of a complaint

being made and shall retain a record of the correspondence and any action taken. If it proves impossible to respond fully within 15 working days, the complainant shall be informed of the timescale for the receipt of a full response.

3. If the complaint is about non-selection, the relevant staff member must satisfy themselves that the application was considered fairly and that the decision did comply with the relevant School selection policy. Provided that they are satisfied that this is the case, a response explaining the context of the decision (e.g. demand for places) and the School selection policy that has been applied is acceptable at this stage. The response should also draw the applicant's attention to the Complaints Procedure, in case s/he wishes to pursue the matter further. For all other complaints, if a complaint is rejected, the relevant staff member must state the precise reasons.

### **Stage two: formal complaint**

1. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the response s/he receives from the relevant staff member, s/he should submit, within ten working days of receiving the response, a completed Admissions Complaint Form to the Head of Admissions and Student Recruitment, or the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic Services if the complaint relates to the Head of Admissions and Student Recruitment. Formal complaints will only be considered if there are submitted on the Admissions Complaint Form. This process should also be followed if an applicant chooses to proceed directly with a formal complaint, without having initially made an informal complaint. If the applicant has not previously submitted an informal complaint, the formal complaint must normally be made within 15 working days of the actions (or lack of actions) that prompted the complaint.
2. The written complaint should set out briefly:
  - the nature of the complaint;
  - the informal steps already taken (if any);
  - details of the response received;
  - a statement as to why the applicant remains dissatisfied and, without prejudice to any formal remedy which might be determined, the remedy which s/he is seeking.
3. The member of staff shall acknowledge in writing receipt of a complaint within five working days. The member of staff will investigate the complaint and submit a written response to the complainant, by the issue of a Completion of Procedures letter, normally within twenty working days of the receipt of the complaint. If it should prove impossible to respond fully within twenty working days, the applicant shall be informed in writing of the timescale for the receipt of a full response.
4. In the event of any concern that the applicant has been unfairly treated, the relevant staff member will take the matter up with the relevant Admissions Tutors and/or Dean of School as appropriate and any such investigation and its outcomes will form a part of the Completion of Procedures letter.

### Stage three: appeal against the outcome of a complaint

5. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome as provided in the Completion of Procedures letter, s/he should submit, within ten working days of receiving the letter, a written appeal to the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic Services. If the formal complaint had been dealt with by the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic Services, the appeal should be directed to the Dean of School.
6. The appeal should set out briefly:
  - the nature of the initial complaint;
  - details of the response received;
  - a statement as to why the applicant remains dissatisfied and, without prejudice to any formal remedy which might be determined, the remedy which s/he is seeking.
7. The member of staff shall acknowledge in writing receipt of an appeal within five working days. The member of staff will investigate the original complaint and will inform the applicant of the outcome of this investigation, normally within twenty working days of the receipt of the appeal. If it should prove impossible to respond fully within twenty working days, the applicant shall be informed in writing of the timescale for the receipt of a full response.
8. If grounds are found to revisit the outcome contained in the original Completion of Procedures letter, then the appeal will require a new investigation into the complaint, the outcome of which will be notified to the applicant in the appeal outcome letter.
9. The relevant staff member's decision following completion of their appeal investigation will be considered as final and the School will not enter into any further correspondence once the outcome of the appeal has been notified to the applicant.