

Student Academic Complaints Policy

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Purpose, scope and application
3. Key principles
4. Policy guidelines
5. Approval policy
6. Related policies
7. Revision history
8. Document protocol

This policy reflects current UK legislation and will be updated in line with any legislative or regulatory changes.

1. Introduction

A policy describes our approach to a certain issue. A procedure supports a policy and guides on the process to follow in dealing with this. The procedure is attached as an Appendix.

SAE Institute is committed to promoting a collaborative and collegial teaching and learning environment and will undertake all necessary actions to resolve complaints in a fair and expeditious manner.

2. Policy purpose, scope and application

2.1 Purpose

This policy sets out to demonstrate a clear commitment to the prompt handling and resolution of all academic complaints and appeals.

2.2 Scope

Circumstances may arise where a student feels that the published examinations or assessment procedures have not been correctly followed and ask whether a review of the outcome be merited. A request of this nature constitutes as an academic complaint. Academic complaints may also relate to decisions regarding their progress in a course of study.

All other types of complaint are non-academic complaints and will be dealt with in accordance to the appropriate policy.

This policy applies to all SAE UK students studying SAE Institute programmes or awards, and at all campuses providing collaborative programmes or operations with Middlesex University, and should be read in conjunction with other student policies.

2.3 Application

Typical grounds for a student to raise an academic complaint may include:

- Their performance suffered in an assessment due to illness or other factors which they were unable to, or for valid reasons unwilling to disclose before the results were awarded.
 - A complaint under such grounds will normally be dismissed without an acceptable explanation and evidence is given for not presenting the extenuating circumstances in advance of the results being awarded.
- An assessment or an academic decision was not conducted in accordance with SAE Institute programme regulations or procedures.
- There was a material administrative error in the conduct of an assessment or calculation of a grade.

Before raising an academic complaint, students should note that:

- An academic complaint regarding an assessment or examination decision, may only be raised once the result has been formally communicated to a student.
- Dissatisfaction with an assessment outcome is not grounds for an academic complaint.
- A complaint will not be accepted if it is based on a student's claim of ignorance of the rules or policies, or that they were unaware of the complaint procedure or their rights and responsibilities. This includes the process for presenting extenuating circumstances.
- If the complaint relates to an issue covered within or is associated with a non-academic complaint, then that complaint process should be fully completed before the academic complaint process will be initiated.
- If a student is in doubt which complaint their complaint falls into, this should be raised with the Academic Coordinator (AC) or the Student Experience Manager (SEM) in the first instance who will determine the appropriate policy and process.

3. Key principles

All complaints will be:

- Treated seriously and with fairness and impartiality.
- Dealt with promptly and resolved within the specific SAE Campus as far as is possible. However, there may be times where another Campus will be asked to become involved, either for additional independent review, or to provide additional resource or expertise.
- Treated consistently across the Institute.
- Subject to the principles of natural justice.
- Dealt with and resolved wherever possible without recourse to the formal stage, unless the matter is of significant gravity.
- Shall be resolved without prejudice to a complainant's right to pursue available and legitimate pathways of complaint outside SAE Institute, having first exhausted the matter internally via this policy.

A complainant shall not be disadvantaged, nor subject to discrimination, victimisation or any other form of harassment as a result of raising a complaint.

However, if it is found that the complaint is being made with vexatious or malicious intent, SAE may refer to the Student Code of Conduct and consideration of their progression may be terminated. Vexatious or malicious complaints are defined as, but not limited to:

- Complaints which are obsessive, harassing or repetitive.
- Insistence on pursuing non-meritorious complaints and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes.
- Insistence on pursuing what may be meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

4. Policy guidelines

4.1 General

Where a complaint is made by a group of students, one student should be clearly highlighted as the main point of contact for the complaint. Any findings and decisions will be provided to each member of the group in which the complaint corresponds.

The complainant will not be required to meet any costs associated with lodging a complaint, provided the policy has been adhered to.

In some cases, a flexible approach may need to be undertaken in order to progress a complaint, this could be due to, but not limited to:

- Impact of serious events, for example pandemics.
- Vacant posts which are assigned to a complaint stage.
- Staff illness.
- Campus closures.

In a case where flexibility is introduced, our aim is to resolve a complaint via the outlined stages but may have the involvement of different roles to those listed or an alternative procedure to that outlined in this policy. Where this is impacting on a case, we will notify you procedural change.

4.2 Early Resolution

Prior to lodging a formal complaint, students should discuss their concerns informally with the Academic Coordinator (AC).

This should take place as soon as possible and normally within five working days of the issue.

If this does not resolve the matter, or is deemed to have been of significant gravity by the Academic Coordinator, any formal complaint must be made in writing **within ten days**:

- either of the meeting, or
- if being questioned, the results having been received or after they have been confirmed by an Assessment Board. It is expected that queries with respect to results from the early stages of the program will have been raised informally and resolved at that time, and not left to challenge at a later stage of study.

4.3 Formal Complaint

A formal complaint should include a detailed breakdown of the reasons for the complaint, with supporting evidence and documents, and comply with *Section 2, Application* guidelines.

A member of Campus management will be appointed to investigate the matter and the complainant will be given the opportunity to present their case and explain the issue in more detail.

4.3.1 Investigation, evidence and record keeping

Where further information is required as part of the investigation into the complaint, this must be provided promptly by the complainant to avoid any undue delays. If not, the outcome will be made based upon the information available.

The investigation will be noted for the record, and all documents will be maintained and treated as confidential in accordance with the Institute's Privacy Policy.

If it is deemed necessary to record any meetings, this will be with the mutual consent of all parties and using SAE equipment. No other forms of recordings of the proceedings (i.e. covert) will be allowed.

4.3.2 Right of representation

A student may appoint a representative to submit a complaint for them. Typically, this would be the class representative, although a different class representative or student of their choosing may be chosen.

Legal representation is not permitted, and communications from legal representatives shall not normally be responded to.

4.3.3 Timelines

Complaints may be considered "out of time" if not received in writing within 28 calendar days of the incident to which they refer. SAE Institute will exercise discretion where there is good reason, supported by evidence, for late submission of a complaint. SAE Institute is mindful of our obligations under the Equality Act when considering whether there are exceptional reasons to accept a complaint outside the normal time limit, or whether it would be reasonable to make adjustments to our procedures.

All formal complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days upon receipt.

We aim to resolve all complaints within 90 calendar days. In more complex cases, flexible deadlines may need to be used; where this is applicable, we will inform you of revised timings. The 90 calendar day timeframe requires students to meet any deadlines set by SAE Institute for the submission of material. There will occasionally be circumstances when, for good reason, SAE Institute will need to extend the timeframe. Where this is the case, we will notify you and keep you informed of progress.

We will also take reasonable steps to ensure that all matters are reviewed thoroughly and professionally, and so at times this deadline may need to be extended, for example, where the complaint is complex, additional information has not been received, or witnesses are not available within the original timescales. We will write to advise of any extended timescales.

4.3.4 Academic complaint outcome

Once the review into the complaint has been concluded, the proposed outcome will be advised in writing to the complainant, allowing them 10 working days to submit their response.

If no contact is received by this date, the matter will be deemed closed, and a formal closure will be sent on the date given.

The complainant has the right to appeal from the date of formal closure, which must be put in writing to the nominated individual stated within the document within 10 working days of the date of the formal closure letter.

If no contact is received by this date, the complaint will be considered resolved and a Completion of Procedures (CoP) will be provided.

4.3.5 4.3.5 Collaborative Partner University Level Review (CPULR): Middlesex University

- If the complaint relates to a programme validated by Middlesex University, the complainant may refer the complaint to Middlesex University once all SAE Institute internal complaints procedures have been exhausted. SAE Institute will inform a student if their case is eligible for an CPULR in the outcome of their complaint.
- The external appeal to Middlesex process is outlined within:
 - Middlesex University Regulations 19/20 > Student complaints and grievance procedures - Complaints in relation to collaborative partner institutions.
https://www.mdx.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/535186/Regulations-2019-20.pdf

4.3.6 Further support

SAE subscribes to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education, an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. Further information is available at: www.oiahe.org.uk.

When the Institute's complaint procedures have been concluded (including where applicable a CULPR), the final confirmation notification will include a Completion of Procedures letter, (CoP). Where a student remains dissatisfied with the final decision, they may raise this the OIA, and an OIA Complaint Form must be received by the OIA within 12 months of the date of the final letter of completion letter sent by SAE Institute.

The form can be accessed by their website at:

<http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx>.

Alternatively, a student can telephone or write to the OIA for a form. The form should be sent to the OIA accompanied by a copy of the completion letter.

The OIA also publishes a guide for the Scheme, which can be downloaded from <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/2264/intrototheoia-students-jan-2019.pdf>.

Guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can also be found on the OIA's website: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us/>

The OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with and concluded through our internal process, including the Middlesex University appeal stage.

5. Approval policy

This Policy is fully supported by the ELT and Board.

6. Related policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:

- Student Code of Conduct
- Student Non-Academic Complaint Policy
- Academic Honesty Policy

7. Revision history

Version Control

Issue Date:	Summary of Changes	Review Date
October 2018	Revised policy	October 2020
June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update review and rebranding • Consideration given to actions taken following the COVID-19 pandemic 	June 2022

8. Document protocol

Document I.D.	A07: Student Academic Complaint Policy
Responsibility	Student Experience Manager
Initial Issue Date	October 2018

End