



COMPLAINTS: POLICY & PROCEDURE

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This policy covers all areas across the Education for Industry (EFI) Group. It is a standard policy and process that applies to EFI Group, and all subsequent Divisions¹. The exception relates to complaints relating to any aspect of the admissions process.

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¹ Fashion Retail Academy (FRA), London College of Beauty Therapy (LCBT), Education for Industry Training (EFIT)

1.0 KEY PRINCIPLES AND AIMS

The EFI Group Complaints Policy and Procedure is governed by the following key principles:

- 1.1 This policy applies to all complaints within FE, HE and Apprenticeship provision, and related EFI Group services and departments (with the exception of complaints relating to any aspect of the admissions process which should be raised according to the process outlined at 6.0 below).
- 1.2 The EFI Group strives for excellence and aims to continually raise the standard of teaching, learning and services provided to students and other key stakeholders. The EFI Group values the opportunity presented by complaints to continuously monitor our service and strive for improvements.
- 1.3 All complaints will be managed in accordance with EFI Group's Data Protection Policy and in compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All complainants should feel that they can bring issues of concern, difficulties or differences of opinion to the attention of the EFI Group. Complainants have a right to expect that they will be listened to and that their concerns will be investigated properly and dealt with fairly without fear of recrimination or penalty.
- 1.4 The overarching policy and procedures are monitored by the Associate Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) and a summary of outcomes is reported to the Quality Steering Committee (QSC), and the Board of Governors, as appropriate.
- 1.5 Complaints should be submitted within eight (8) weeks of the incident, or from the point at which the complainant became aware of the issue. Any delay in submitting a complaint will need to be fully explained and may be grounds for rejection.
- 1.6 In cases where a student is over 18 years of age, the EFI Group will request the student's permission to pursue the complaint when parents/guardians (or other third parties) make a complaint on the student's behalf. In such cases permission must be received from the student in writing.
- 1.7 All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the timescales outlined within this document. In exceptional cases, where it may not be possible to meet a prescribed deadline, all affected parties will be made aware in writing at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.8 Every attempt should be made to resolve complaints informally through a dialogue with those immediately concerned.
- 1.9 Students or complainants who require reasonable adjustments (RAs), including access to this policy in alternative formats (e.g., large print, screen reader-friendly versions), should contact EFI Group Student Services department directly in the first instance.

- 1.10 All complaints must be supported by documented evidence. Failure to submit evidence with a completed complaint form will result in rejection.
- 1.11 Complaints may be submitted collectively by a group of students or stakeholders where the issues raised are substantially the same and relate to a shared experience. One individual should be nominated as the lead complainant and act as the main point of contact for the group.

All individuals included in the group complaint must confirm in writing that they:

- Consent to the lead complainant representing them,
- Agree that the complaint accurately reflects a shared experience and the matters raised are common to all complainants.

It is the responsibility of the group to ensure, prior to submission, that the complaint genuinely reflects a collective issue. Group complaints should not be used where individual circumstances differ significantly. This helps ensure that any proposed resolution is relevant and acceptable to all members.

Where a resolution is proposed but not all group members agree to accept it, those who do agree may proceed to accept the outcome and have their complaints formally closed. The remaining complainants will have their cases separated and continued as individual complaints, commencing from the current stage in the procedure. They will not be required to resubmit their complaint unless new issues are raised that were not part of the original group complaint.

Group complaints will be managed in accordance with the same principles and timescales as individual complaints, although additional time may be required depending on the scale and complexity of the case.

- 1.12 This policy is informed by current UK legislation and relevant regulatory guidance, including but not limited to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), OfS (for HE), and the Equality Act 2010.

2.0 ISSUES EXCLUDED FROM THE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The following areas are excluded from the EFI Complaints Policy and Procedure:

- 2.1 Complaints raised about any aspect of the admissions process (see section [6.0](#) below).
- 2.2 Complaints in relation to the decision of Final Award Boards. Such matters are covered by the relevant Appeals Procedure for the qualification or Awarding Body (for HE provision any appeals would follow the [Falmouth Appeals Procedure](#)).

- 2.3 Complaints in relation to the outcomes of a student disciplinary hearing. Students have a right of appeal against the findings of a disciplinary hearing through a separate procedure which will be managed at division level by the relevant Head of Curriculum, or nominated Director.
- 2.4 Complaints against fellow students unless those students are acting as agents or employees of EFI Group or its divisions.
- 2.5 Complaints involving safeguarding concerns will be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and managed under the EFI Safeguarding Policy. These are not subject to standard complaint timescales.

3.0 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The procedure is made up of a number of stages which are required to occur in sequence. The following section outlines each stage of the complaint procedure and indicates roles and responsibilities alongside timescales and potential outcomes.]

3.1 RAISING A CONCERN [INFORMAL]

The initial stage of the complaints process is designed to facilitate an informal discussion with the staff members most directly involved in the issue or concern. Wherever possible, complaints should be addressed promptly and resolved at a local level through open dialogue or a meeting.

If a student does not feel comfortable approaching the individual directly involved, they are encouraged to contact their Head of Curriculum, Programme Manager (or equivalent), or Personal Tutor (if appropriate).

Concerns may be raised in person or by email. Where appropriate, a meeting may be offered between the student and the relevant staff member or departmental representative. The aim of this informal stage is to reach a timely and mutually agreeable resolution.

Any resolution reached will be recorded in writing and a summary will be shared with the student. A copy will also be retained by the relevant department in line with the EFI Group data retention policy.

Students may access support from Student Services or the Students' Union (for HE) throughout the process and may be accompanied to any informal meetings by a friend, advisor, or SU representative.

Where suitable, informal mediation may also be offered to support the resolution of the concern.

The expectation is that concerns raised informally will be acknowledged, acted upon, and resolved within 10 (ten) working days of receipt.

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, or if the student remains dissatisfied, staff will advise them of their right to submit a formal complaint, refer them to this policy, and explain the next steps in the procedure.

3.2 STAGE I – INVESTIGATION BY THE HEAD OF QAE* [FORMAL]

If a complaint cannot be resolved through informal discussion, or if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome at that stage, they may escalate the matter by initiating the formal Stage I process.

To do so, the complainant must complete the Complaints Form (Annex 1) and submit it, along with any supporting evidence, to qae@efigroup.ac.uk.

Upon receipt of the completed form, the Associate Director of QAE will begin an investigation, which will normally be concluded within 22 (twenty-two) working days.

The Associate Director of QAE will review all information provided and may consult relevant staff or request further clarification if necessary. Where appropriate, a meeting may be arranged with the complainant to discuss the issues raised in more detail.

Students may seek advice and support from Student Services or the Students' Union (for HE) throughout the process and may be accompanied to any meetings by a friend, advisor, or representative.

The outcome of the investigation will be communicated in writing by email to the address provided on the Complaints Form. The response will include a summary of findings, the decision made, and any actions to be taken. The possible outcomes of the investigation include, but are not limited to, those outlined in section [4.0](#) of this policy

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome at Stage I, they will be informed of their right to request a review under Stage II of this procedure.

* Where the Associate Director of QAE is not able to undertake the investigation, this will be delegated to the relevant Director of Education.

3.3 STAGE II – FINAL REVIEW BY PRINCIPAL & CEO EFI GROUP (OR NOMINATED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/DIRECTOR) [FORMAL]

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the outcome of the Stage I formal investigation, they may request a final review by the Principal & CEO of EFI Group (or their nominated Executive Director/Director), thereby initiating Stage II of the complaints procedure.

To initiate Stage II, the complainant must submit a written request to the Principal & CEO via the Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Office at qae@efigroup.ac.uk within 10 (ten) working days of receiving the Stage I outcome. The request should include:

- The specific aspects of the Stage I outcome with which the complainant is dissatisfied.
- The reasons why the Stage I response is considered unsatisfactory.
- The desired resolution.

The QAE Office will acknowledge receipt of the Stage II request within 48 (forty-eight) hours. A summary of the complaint and the College's response to date will be provided to the Principal & CEO (or nominated Executive Director/Director) for review.

The Stage II review will normally be completed within 14 (fourteen) working days of receipt of the request. The reviewer may, at their discretion, arrange a further meeting with the complainant to clarify points or discuss the matter in more detail.

Students may seek support from Student Services or the Students' Union (for HE) during this process and may be accompanied to any meetings.

The outcome of the Stage II review will be communicated to the complainant in writing. Possible outcomes of this stage, and others, are set out in section [4.0](#) of this policy.

The decision of the Stage II review is final within EFI Group's internal complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised of any external options available to them, depending on the Awarding Institution and regulatory framework for the qualification.

3.4 STAGE III – ESCALATION TO AWARDING/VALIDATING INSTITUTION [FORMAL]

In the event that a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage II, they may request a review of the procedure undertaken. This will essentially be escalated to the relevant Awarding/Validating Body for review.

The procedure for Stage III will depend on the rules and regulations set by the Awarding/Validating Body. In order to initiate this stage of the process, the complainant is required to request a Stage III escalation to gae@efigroup.ac.uk in the first instance. This request must be sent within 10 (ten) working days of the outcome of the Stage II. An officer from QAE will then advise on the required next steps.

- For Higher Education students, complaints relating to academic standards can be escalated to Falmouth University.
- For complaints relating to qualifications awards, the relevant Awarding Body may be contacted.
- For publicly funded or financed students on Further Education programmes, complaints may be escalated to the Education and Skills Funding Body.

Generally, grounds for a Stage III escalation will be the following:

- A material error or irregularity in the conduct of Stage II of the EFI Group Complaints Policy and Procedure; and/or
- A student has new evidence that has become available since the commencement of the Stage II that they were unable, for valid reasons, to provide by the original Stage II complaint deadline.

Should a complaint be made against the Principal & CEO of EFI Group, these should be addressed directly to the Chair of the Board of Governors, c/o the Clerk to the Board of Governors. For further information on this process, advice should be sought from the QAE Office in the first instance gae@efigroup.ac.uk

Should a complaint be made against the Chair of the Board of Governors, these should be addressed directly to the Clerk to the Board of Governors and the Principal & CEO of the EFI Group. For further information on this process, advice should be sought from the QAE Office in the first instance gae@efigroup.ac.uk

Should a complaint be made against the Clerk to the Board of Governors, these should be addressed directly to the Chair of the Board of Governors and the Principal & CEO of EFI Group. For further information on this process, advice should be sought from the QAE Office in the first instance gae@efigroup.ac.uk

4.0 POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF FORMAL INVESTIGATIONS

During the formal stages of the complaints process, the investigation may result in one or more of the following outcomes:

- **Complaint Upheld in Full**
The complaint is fully substantiated. Appropriate remedial actions will be recommended or implemented to address the issue.
- **Complaint Upheld in Part**
Some aspects of the complaint are substantiated, while others are not. The outcome will clearly specify which parts are upheld and what actions will follow.
- **Complaint Not Upheld**
The complaint is not supported by the evidence. Reasons for this decision will be communicated clearly to the complainant.
- **Complaint Withdrawn**
The complainant chooses to withdraw the complaint, and the process is discontinued.
- **Referral to Alternative Procedure**
If the complaint falls outside the scope of this policy, it may be redirected to a more appropriate procedure (e.g., academic appeals, disciplinary processes, mediation).
- **Recommendations for Improvement**
The investigation may identify opportunities for improving processes, policies, or staff training to prevent similar issues in the future.
- **Right to Escalate or Request a Review**
If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they will be informed of their right to escalate the complaint to the next stage of the process as outlined in section 3.0.

5.0 COMPLETION OF PROCEDURES (CoP) LETTER

The completion of Stage III marks the conclusion of the EFI Group's internal processes and outlines that there is no further avenue for the student internally. At this point, a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter may be issued. A COP letter may be required by particular Regulatory Bodies should you wish to take your complaint to a further. It is a formal record that all internal stages and procedures have been followed.

If, following all internal stages, a complaint is not upheld, a COP will automatically be provided to you. If a complaint is upheld or partly upheld, complainants have the option to request a COP.

A QAE Officer will be able to provide further guidance should you wish to request this. In some instances, a COP will automatically be provided to you. Requests should be made to gae@efigroup.ac.uk within 28 days of the Stage III outcome.

6.0 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR ADMISSIONS

The following procedure is applicable to EFI Group Division applicants who wish to appeal a decision made on their application, or raise a concern regarding a procedural error, irregularity or administration error in the application process.

The procedure applies to applicants for FE and Apprenticeship provision at any division within EFI Group. For HE provision, applicants are advised to follow the complaints procedures for our validating partner Falmouth University.

Once a student has completed enrolment they would normally use the EFI Group Complaint Procedures outlined in section [3.0](#) above.

6.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Complaints can cover a wide range of issues which may have resulted in an irregularity in the conduct of the application process and be material enough to affect the outcome (of the application). This may include the way in which an application has been handled, the outcome of the selection, or, where applicable, the way in which an applicant has been interviewed.
- Complaints in relation to academic judgement² will not be accepted.
- All complaints will be dealt with in confidence, and as close as possible to the point in time that it arises.

6.2 ADMISSIONS COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Initially, concerns should be raised by telephone or email. The member of staff responding to the concern is responsible for listening to all details in full and taking notes of all relevant information. If the applicant is not content with the response provided, they should be informed that they are able to make a formal complaint, following the procedure outlined below:

- Complaints relating to admissions should be made no more than 14 working days after the communication of the

² Defined as a judgement about a matter where only the opinion of an academic expert will suffice.

admissions decision, or after the cause of the complaint arises.

- Formal complaints must be made in writing, either by email or by letter, and should be sent to the EFI Group Applicant Services Manager. The Complaints Form is not required for concerns relating to admissions.
- The Applicant Services Manager will confirm if the complaint is within the scope of the policy, and, if so, will confirm in writing to the applicant that the complaint has been received and will be investigated within 14 working days.
- The Applicant Services Manager may appoint a member of their team to act as the Investigator on their behalf. If this is the case, they will ensure that they are independent from the issues under consideration.
- An initial investigation will be conducted, and a recommendation will be put forward. The Applicant Services Manager will discuss the case with the EFI Group Director of Marketing to ensure they have a full understanding of the case before a formal response is made.
- The response to the complaint will be confirmed in writing to the applicant.
- The written response will mark the completion of the complaint.
- All correspondence, along with any notes relating to the case will be retained by the Applicant Services Manager.

6.0 STUDENT COMPLAINT FORM

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS CONFIDENTIAL

Before completing this form:

- Please ensure you have read the EFI Group Complaints Policy;
- If you require advice or support in completing this form, please contact the QAE Office in the first instance who will liaise with Student Services to allocate support; gae@efigroup.ac.uk;
- Please note that this form **should not be completed for concerns relating to admissions**. Any such concerns should be made in writing to the Applicant Services Manager via enquiry@efigroup.ac.uk (see section 5.0 of the FRA Complaints Policy)..

Please submit the completed form to gae@efigroup.ac.uk along with supporting evidence, and ensure you retain a copy for your records.

6.1 PART A: DETAILS OF COMPLAINANT		
1	First Name:	
	Surname:	
	Email address:	
	Contact Telephone:	
	Postal Address:	
	If you are/were a student, please provide us with the following details: Course: Year of Study: Course Leader:	
2	Do you have a disability? Y/N	
	Do you think you will need any disability related support of adjustments at any stage during the complaints process?	Y/N
	If yes, please provide further details of your requirements below:	
3	Have you spoken to anyone about your complaint? (e.g. your Course Leader, a student representative, other staff member?)	Y/N

	If yes, please provide the person's name and position:	
	Have you attempted to resolve your complaint informally as per the required Early Resolution stage of the process?	Y/N
	If yes, please provide details of the member of staff you spoke with and provide a summary of the meeting/discussion, and outcome:	

6.2 PART B: SUPPORTING STATEMENT	
4	Please outline below the reasons for your Stage I Formal Complaint:
	Please indicate the resolution you are seeking:
	<p>Please list all evidence in support of your complaint which should be attached to this form, as Appropriate (please note that forms submitted without evidence will be rejected):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. <p><i>[Delete/continue as appropriate]</i></p>

5	<p>I confirm that I have had access to a copy of the EFI Group complaints policy and know I can ask for clarification on the procedures at any time:</p> <p>Y/N</p>	
	Complainant Signature:	Date:
	<p>*In line with the Data Protection Act 2018, if you are appealing on behalf of a student who is over the age of 18, the student in question must provide consent by signing the declaration below:</p> <p><i>I confirm that I am happy for the person noted above to submit the complaint on my behalf. I give permission for the EFI Group to liaise with the named person on any matters relating to this complaint.</i></p> <p>Y/N</p>	
	Student Signature:	Date