



The Ridge (Scotland) CIC
Student Complaints Policy and Procedures

Dear Student

The Ridge (Scotland) CIC is committed to providing a high quality experience through its academic teaching, and its broad range of professional services and facilities. It encourages a positive environment in which informal contact and feedback from students is welcomed and where constructive complaints can be dealt with effectively.

Consequently, the Ridge, in consultation with staff and students, has established an open, fair and accessible Student Complaints Policy and Procedures in order to encourage the prompt resolution of problems at the earliest stage possible. In this document, you will find useful general information about making complaints, detailed information on the policy and procedures themselves and a summary chart showing the different stages of the process. The document is also available on our website www.the-ridge.org.uk under 'Policies'.

The Policy and Procedures apply to all individuals who are studying on any Ridge programmes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ridge is committed to delivering a high quality service and maintaining effective procedures to allow all members of its student community, to bring forward complaints where there is cause for concern. It is the University's aim to settle complaints promptly, fairly and courteously in the best interests of all parties, and to address areas where improvement is identified. The Ridge is keen to ensure that the interests and well-being of all those associated with a complaint are properly safeguarded.

1.2 The Ridge aims to handle complaints in a manner which:

- encourages informal conciliation nearest to the source of the complaint
- facilitates early resolution
- is efficient and fair
- treats complaints with appropriate seriousness, sympathy and confidentiality
- ensures that the Ridge practice improves as a result where this is relevant.

1.3 This document is relevant for all students wishing to complain about any aspect of the Ridge's provision, including:

- teaching and academic facilities, including quality of teaching and supervision, and practical facilities
- academic services, such as computing and library facilities
- personal support
- the behaviour of another student
- the behaviour of a member of staff

1.4 The UK Quality Assurance Agency (www.qaa.ac.uk) Code of Practice (Section 5) on 'Academic Appeals and Student Complaints on Academic Matters', October 2007, has been used to create this document. The Code of Practice advises that dealing with a complaint fairly and justly should include:

- dealing with the complaint in a way that is proportionate to the complexity of the issues and the resources of the parties involved
- making provision for informality and flexibility in the proceedings, as appropriate
- ensuring, as far as possible, that the parties involved are on an equal footing procedurally and able to participate fully in the proceedings, including

- assisting or otherwise facilitating the complainant in presentation of their case
- avoiding delay as far as is compatible with fairness and the proper consideration of the matter.

1.5 Guidance provided by the Quality Assurance Agency in the Code of Practice indicates that monitoring complaints is an effective way of helping institutions to ensure that procedures are fair and are working as intended. An anonymised summary of complaints on record and how they have been managed is reported annually to the Ridge's Board of Directors.

1.6 The Ridge seeks to handle complaints effectively in accordance with the key principles indicated by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)'s office ie to be: User-focused; Accessible; Simple and Timely; Thorough, Proportionate and Consistent; and Objective, Impartial and Fair, while seeking early resolution and delivering improvement.

1.7 The procedures outlined below have been established with the aim, where possible, of resolving complaints informally and through negotiation between those individuals who are immediately concerned with the issue. The Ridge recognises, however, that some complaints cannot be resolved by informal means alone and may require formal intervention. The formal procedures also covered here are therefore available to students in the event that informal pursuit of a complaint proves unsatisfactory.

1.8 If a complaint is deemed by the Ridge to be of a particularly serious nature, the Ridge reserves the right to move the complaint to formal investigation at the most appropriate stage of the procedures from the outset. Furthermore, the Ridge undertakes to respond quickly to any complaints where there is evidence of a breakdown in the relationship between the student complainant and the subject of the complaint.

1.10 The Ridge believes that an open, fair and accessible Complaints policy is in everybody's interest and indeed that its existence encourages the prompt resolution of problems at the earliest stage. The Ridge is confident that the overwhelming majority of students will use these Procedures in a positive spirit in order to improve the quality of life and study at the Ridge for all members of the academic community. However, it is possible that a very small minority may misuse the Procedures. In exceptional circumstances, therefore, the Ridge reserves the right to investigate complaints and then to decline to consider any which are vexatious or where demands are unreasonable or where the complainant is unreasonably persistent. The Ridge will provide a brief response outlining the reasons for deciding not to investigate further, but will not enter into lengthy correspondence about such cases.

1.11 Similarly, the Ridge reserves the right to refuse to deal with any complainant who takes an aggressive or abusive approach towards members of staff; all staff have the right to be treated courteously and with respect.

1.12 Adjustments will be made to the procedures to accommodate the needs to disabled students and a version of this document can be provided in a format suitable for access by disabled students.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 A 'Complaint' is defined as any specific concern a student might have relating to the Ridge including a concern about the provision of a programme of study or

academic related service or facility provided by the Ridge. The procedures detailed in this booklet cover only Complaints from Students.

2.2 An 'Appeal' is a request for a review of a decision which has been made by an academic body charged with making decisions on student progression, assessment and awards. Procedures for Appeals are dealt with through a different process as detailed in our 'Student Appeals Procedure', which can be found on our website. A formal Complaint cannot be raised whilst a matter is in the process of being considered as an Appeal.

2.3 A person who makes a complaint is known as the 'Complainant'.

2.6 Other Ridge Policies. There are other Ridge policies relating to Equal Opportunities, Health and Safety, Child Protection and Data Protection. Further information is available on the University website at www.the-ridge.org.uk

3. GUIDE TO MAKING A COMPLAINT

3.1 Why should I complain? No service is perfect: mistakes can happen, things could be arranged better. Students are encouraged to let us know if things could be improved. If we are not aware that there is a problem, we cannot put it right. Alerting us to problems can also help other students and future students to get a better service. By raising a complaint where you feel there is real justification you are helping yourself, helping other students and helping the Ridge.

3.2 Can someone make a complaint on my behalf? A student should submit his or her own complaint. In exceptional circumstances, a complaint may be submitted on behalf of a student by a third party who has a personal connection with the student. Such a complaint must include signed written authorisation by the student that he or she is content for the complaint to be pursued by the specified third party on behalf of the student. This procedure accords with the UK Data Protection Act and with practice across the UK further education sector. In dealing with the complaint, the Ridge will still wish to have direct contact with the student during the process of investigation and may require a meeting in person with the complainant. At any stage of the complaints procedures the complainant may be accompanied to meetings by a family member or friend, a fellow student or a member of staff acting in a supportive capacity.

3.3 To whom should I complain? Advice may be sought from a variety of sources depending on the nature of the problem. There are a number of people at the Ridge who can be approached and you may find it helpful to speak to one of these individuals before taking your complaint further, particularly if there is something worrying you, or you have a serious complaint, or if it is an issue that affects a number of students. You may wish to consider approaching your course tutor in the first instance, or there may be someone else with whom you would feel more comfortable chatting about issues concerning you.

It is in everybody's interests to deal with problems quickly and informally. If you feel you have been treated unfairly, let the person you are dealing with know. If this does not resolve the issue, ask to speak to the Managing Director (Kate Darrah). If you are still not content, this booklet outlines the next steps to take.

3.4 How do I go about making a complaint? Before making an official complaint, there are various possible other ways to obtain help (outlined in this booklet), depending on the nature of the problem. If you are unable to resolve your problem using these routes, the Ridge has a Student Complaints Procedure as outlined in this booklet. The Ridge has appointed a Student Complaints Officer (SCO) from amongst its Board Members, whose contact details are provided on page 1 of this booklet. The SCO is responsible for ensuring that any formal complaint raised is dealt with appropriately by the Ridge.

3.5 What if I don't want to raise the issue informally? If you have good reason for not raising the issue informally, you can choose to go to the next Stage of the Complaints Procedures as detailed in this booklet. The SCO will still need to investigate the complaint in conjunction with the relevant section of the Ridge.

3.6 What if I don't want to complain because it might affect my assessment? The Ridge has made a commitment that no student will be penalised for complaining and guidance is given to Teaching Staff to this effect. Members of staff involved in handling the various stages of a particular complaint are obliged to ensure that such a complaint does not influence the assessment of the complainant's academic work or the way in which the student is treated.

3.7 Will the person I complain about find out? Individuals who are the subject of a complaint are entitled to know who has raised a complaint about them and the nature of the complaint. If you are at all concerned about this you should get advice from the SCO (Kate Darrah). If, in exceptional circumstances and for justifiable reasons (which must be documented), a complainant wishes to remain anonymous from the individual about whom the complaint is made, this may be considered, for example in the initial stages of harassment procedures (which are detailed in a separate policy). However, the SCO will normally wish to undertake confidential discussions in person with the complainant and will need to raise the complaint with the subject of the complaint.

3.8 How will the complaint be resolved? When making any sort of complaint, it is always worth thinking about how you would like the complaint to be resolved and what you would like the Ridge to do to sort out the problem. This helps you in formulating the complaint and makes it clear to the person considering the complaint what you would like them to do.

The Ridge will ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that where a complaint is upheld, appropriate remedial action is taken. Any resulting restitution could include reasonable and proportionate expenses necessarily incurred by a successful complainant.

If other students might be similarly affected by a successfully-concluded complaint, the Ridge will ensure that all such students will be offered remedial action and where appropriate, financial recompense if this is considered to be appropriate for the original complainant.

4. STAGES OF PROCEDURES

If a student wishes to make a complaint, the steps that should be taken are detailed below.

4.1 STAGE 1: INFORMAL DIRECT COMPLAINT AT SOURCE

4.1.1 Where possible, complaints should be raised immediately with the member of staff or other person responsible, the aim being to resolve the problem directly and informally at the earliest opportunity. It is anticipated that the vast majority of complaints will be resolved in this manner.

4.1.2 A student who wishes to complain about treatment by a specific member of staff should try to approach the member of staff in the first instance. If a matter of Ridge policy or practice is the source of the complaint, the student should seek to identify the person with local responsibility for its implementation or operation. For example, complaints about the content of a particular study programme or course should be addressed to the Course Director.

4.1.3 In order to ensure that a complaint is raised at a mutually convenient time, the complainant should try to arrange an appointment with the member of staff concerned. The member of staff may request the presence of a colleague and the complainant may wish to be accompanied by a friend to the meeting. Staff should be willing to deal in a positive manner with complaints raised on an informal basis.

4.1.4 Although Stage 1 is informal, it is advisable for members of staff involved to retain a brief written record and to share the outcome with other members of staff if the matter is not confidential and the experience could benefit the effectiveness of the Section.

4.1.5 If a complainant feels unable to approach the individual concerned directly or is not satisfied with their response to the complaint, the Course Director (eg Rural Skills, Enterprise, Hospitality) may be approached (see Stage 2 below).

4.2 STAGE 2: COMPLAINT TO COURSE DIRECTOR

4.2.1 Where it has not been possible to resolve matters satisfactorily at source, or the complainant feels unable to make direct contact with the person responsible, the matter should be taken to the Course Director, indicating what reasonable steps the complainant would like to see taken to resolve the matter. The complainant must put the complaint in writing; the form contained at Appendix A contains all of the information required.

4.2.2 A complainant should be given an indication by the Course Director of the timescale likely to be required to investigate, reach a resolution on the complaint and report back to the complainant. The investigation should be completed as swiftly as possible and the complainant should be notified in the event of any delay in the process.

4.2.3 Meetings may be arranged between the complainant and the Course Director or other appropriate authority within the Section to discuss the matter. Course Directors should ensure that relevant members of staff are involved at all stages of the process and are informed of the outcome of investigation of the complaint. This may involve, for example, members of staff against whom a complaint is made and the Director responsible for Education.

4.2.4 As part of the process of attempting to establish the facts of the complaint, the Course Director may decide to hold a separate meeting with the person(s) against whom the complaint is made (and who may be accompanied by a colleague or Union representative), and may also interview any material witnesses. A written record of the meeting(s) should be made by the Course Director.

4.2.5 Following thorough investigation, the Course Director will notify the complainant in writing of the conclusions reached and of any consequent action that

will be taken. The Course Director should complete a brief written summary of the complaint, of actions taken to date and of any proposed remedial actions.

4.2.6 If the complainant is not satisfied with the action taken at this level or, for any justifiable recorded reason, feels unable to go through Stages 1 and 2, he/she may choose to proceed to Stage 3 of the procedures.

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4.3 STAGE 3: FORMAL COMPLAINT TO STUDENT COMPLAINTS OFFICER (SCO)

4.3.1 Formal complaints to the Student Complaints Officer (SCO) must be submitted in writing. Complainants must submit a written complaint, with any supporting documentation, directly to the SCO

4.3.2 The SCO will endeavour to acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days of its receipt. The SCO will conduct an investigation, consulting relevant members of the Ridge community as appropriate and may require the complainant to attend a meeting. The complainant may also request a meeting.

4.3.3 If the complaint involves an academic matter, the SCO may invite one of the other relevantly qualified/experienced Board members to assist with an investigation. An ad hoc Complaints Committee may be set up where relevant to consider the evidence and may choose to hold a hearing. Such a hearing will not, however, be conducted as an alternative to staff disciplinary or grievance procedures where these are considered to be required. If the complainant is required to attend the hearing he/she may be accompanied by a family member or friend, a fellow student or a member of staff acting in a supportive capacity. The complainant may also request an opportunity to present his/her case in person.

4.3.4 A complainant should be given an indication by the SCO of the timescale likely to be required to investigate, reach a resolution on the complaint and report back to the complainant. The investigation should be completed as swiftly as possible and the complainant should be notified in the event of any delay in the process.

4.3.5 If the complainant considers that the complaint has not been satisfactorily resolved, the complaint may be referred as an appeal against the decision and must be submitted to the Board of Directors (see Stage 4) within 14 days of the date of the written notification of the outcome of the previous stage, providing a statement on the justification for referral.

4.4 STAGE 4: COMPLAINT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (appeal stage)

4.4.1 The complainant should write to the SCO confirming the request for referral of the complaint to the Board of Directors, and should include any additional supporting information in consideration of the case. The SCO will endeavour to acknowledge the complaint within 5 days of its receipt and will then pass a copy of the documentation collated at the previous stage, plus any new information, to the Board of Directors for investigation and response.

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4.4.2 An ad hoc Complaints Committee may be set up where relevant to consider the evidence and may choose to hold a hearing. Such a hearing will not, however, be conducted as an alternative to staff disciplinary or grievance procedures where these are considered to be required. If the complainant is required to attend the hearing he/she may be accompanied by a family member or friend, a fellow student or a member of staff acting in a supportive capacity. The complainant may also request an opportunity to present his/her case in person.

4.4.3 Written confirmation of the outcome of the investigation by the Board of Directors and any subsequent action which the Ridge intends to take will be provided to the complainant. If the complainant is not satisfied with the action taken, he /she has the right to lodge a case for independent review (see the following sections of this booklet)

5. NEXT STEP: MOVING TO INDEPENDENT REVIEW

5.1 At the point when internal procedures have been exhausted, a clear written statement confirming that the internal procedures have reached completion and the outcome that has been reached must be provided to the complainant. This is known as a 'completion of procedures letter' and is a requirement of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

5.2 Having exhausted all of the internal mechanisms for resolution of a complaint, there is no further recourse to action through the internal Ridge procedures. However, there is a further opportunity for independent consideration of a complaint which has not been satisfactorily resolved and where the complainant remains dissatisfied. The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 provides statutory arrangements for independent review as part of the remit of the SPSO.

5.3 The SPSO will consider complaints about administrative failure, failure to provide a service, or failure in a service provided, where the complainant considers that they have suffered injustice or hardship as a result of these failures. Before making a complaint to the SPSO, a complainant must have exhausted all of the complaint processes in the Ridge and received the Ridge's final response. . Referral to the SPSO should take place within 12 months of receipt of this final response.

5.4 For further information, and a leaflet, contact: The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. Telephone: 0870 011 5378; Text: 0790 049 4372; Fax: 0870 011 5379 e-mail:enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk; Website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk

6. GUIDELINES FOR SECTION HEADS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF STAFF

The Ridge has established open, fair and accessible Complaints Procedures in order to encourage the prompt resolution of problems at the earliest possible stage.

6.1 All Members of Staff

All members of staff must encourage a positive environment where contact with, and feedback from, students is welcomed, and constructive complaints can be dealt with effectively.

All members of staff, particularly mentors, must have a good working knowledge of these Complaints procedures and their underlying principles.

Where possible, complaints should be dealt with as near to source as possible and progressed to the next stage of the Complaints Procedures if the matter cannot be resolved satisfactorily at the previous stage.

Student complainants have the right to be accompanied by a family member or friend, a fellow student or a member of staff (for example, a mentor) acting in a supportive capacity. The complainant may also request an opportunity to present his/her case in person.

Members of staff involved in handling the various stages of complaints are obliged to ensure that the complainant is not disadvantaged either in manner of treatment or

in discrimination in academic assessment or progression as a result of raising the complaint.

The confidentiality of both the complainant and the subject of any complaint must be respected.

Members of staff must be aware of, and comply with, other relevant policies and procedures (for example, Equal Opportunities, Child Protection and Working with Vulnerable Adults, Data Protection and Disciplinary Procedures).

6.2 Course Directors

Course Directors have responsibility for encouraging a positive environment where contact with, and feedback from, students is welcomed, ensuring that complaints are dealt with quickly, fairly and appropriately, and that remedial action is taken where relevant.

Course Directors must ensure that the Complaints Policy and Procedures are followed and that complaints are dealt with timeously in order to avoid escalation of the problem or further complaint.

Clear written records of the various stages of the Complaints Procedures must be confidentially maintained on the student file, in accordance with Data Protection guidance, and with a note of decisions and actions taken (with dates) and a record of outcomes.

Complainants must be notified of the outcome of the investigation and any resultant action or changes in process as appropriate.

Date of policy review: July 2017

Date of next review: July 2018