



Complaints Handling Policy

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Related Policies and Documents

- Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Policy (E1E2.5)
- Equality and Diversity Policy (C1.6)
- Student Protection Plan (C3.1)
- Admissions Policy (C1.2)
- Assessment and Appeals Policy (B07 or equivalent)
- Prevent Duty Policy (E1E2.6)
- Data Protection and Privacy Policy (C1.5)
- Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) – Good Practice Framework

Version History

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1.0	01/08/2023	Original version	Academic Board
2.0	15/09/2025	Restructured; aligned with OfS guidance and OIA framework	Governing Council



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Complaint Handling Policy

Section 1: Policy Summary

1. This policy sets out how Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) handles complaints from students and other stakeholders in a fair, timely, and transparent manner. It supports the institution's commitment to high standards of service and continuous improvement, while protecting the rights and wellbeing of all members of the academic community.
2. The policy distinguishes between informal and formal complaints and provides a clear, staged process for escalation and review. It also outlines the support available to complainants and the responsibilities of staff handling complaints.
3. MHI is committed to ensuring that no student or staff member is disadvantaged for raising a concern in good faith. Complaints are treated confidentially and in line with data protection legislation. Trends are monitored to inform policy review and service enhancement.
4. This policy aligns with the expectations of the Office for Students (OfS), the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Good Practice Framework. It also supports the institution's obligations under OfS Conditions C1 (consumer protection), C3 (student protection), and E2 (governance and oversight).

Section 2: About This Policy

5. This policy explains how Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) manages concerns and complaints from students and other stakeholders. It sets out the principles, responsibilities, and procedures that govern the resolution of complaints and the continuous improvement of services.
6. The purpose of the policy is to:
 - Ensure that concerns and complaints are taken seriously and addressed fairly;
 - Provide a clear and accessible process for resolving complaints at the appropriate level;
 - Protect the rights of all parties involved and promote early resolution;
 - Identify patterns and opportunities for institutional improvement.
7. The policy is structured in two integrated parts:
 - Part 1: Policy Overview and Governance – explains MHI’s principles, commitments, oversight arrangements, and approach to confidentiality and unacceptable behaviour.
 - Part 2: Complaints Procedure – describes the step-by-step process for raising and resolving complaints, including informal resolution, formal stages, escalation, and external review.
8. The Academic Registrar has overall responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of this policy. Students and staff are encouraged to engage with the process in a spirit of mutual respect and a shared commitment to institutional quality and integrity.

Section 3: Scope and Application

9. This policy applies to all current students of Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI), including those studying full-time, part-time, or via distance learning. It also applies to:
- Former students, where the complaint relates to an issue that occurred during their enrolment;
 - Applicants, where the complaint relates to the admissions process;
 - Other stakeholders (e.g. parents, sponsors, employers) in limited circumstances, where their complaint concerns a direct service provided by MHI and does not involve confidential student information.
10. The policy applies to complaints concerning:
- The quality or delivery of academic programmes and teaching;
 - Access to academic or support services;
 - Facilities, communication, or administrative processes;
 - Staff conduct or behaviour;
 - Misleading or inaccurate information;
 - Decisions made without due process.
11. This policy does not apply to:
- Appeals against academic decisions (covered by the Assessment and Appeals Policy);
 - Complaints about student misconduct (covered by the Student Code of Conduct);
 - Matters relating to whistleblowing (covered by the Whistleblower Policy);
 - Safeguarding or Prevent concerns (handled under separate safeguarding procedures).
12. If a complaint falls outside the scope of this policy, the complainant will be advised on the appropriate alternative route.

Part 1: Legal and Regulatory Compliance Framework

Section 4: Regulatory and Governance Context

13. Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) is committed to meeting its legal and regulatory obligations in the handling of student complaints. This policy has been developed in accordance with the following frameworks:

- Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework, including:
 - Condition C1: The provider must provide accurate and timely information to enable informed student choice;
 - Condition C3: The provider must maintain a credible Student Protection Plan and act in students' interests;
 - Condition E2: The provider must have effective management and governance arrangements, including oversight of complaints handling.
- Consumer Protection Law, including the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008, which require that students be treated fairly and provided with accurate information and accessible redress mechanisms.
- The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) – this policy is aligned with the OIA Good Practice Framework and enables students to escalate complaints externally after completing MHI's internal process.
- Data Protection Legislation (UK GDPR) – complaints are managed in line with MHI's Privacy and Data Protection Policy to ensure confidentiality and lawful handling of personal data.

14. This policy also reflects internal governance commitments under MHI's public interest governance framework and is reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with evolving legal, regulatory, and sector expectations.



Section 5: Institutional Commitments

15. Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) recognises that complaints provide valuable feedback and is committed to fostering a culture in which concerns are welcomed, listened to, and addressed promptly and fairly.

16. MHI's institutional commitments are as follows:

- **Accessibility:** The complaints process will be clearly explained, easy to access, and free of unnecessary barriers. Alternative formats and assistance will be made available where needed.
- **Fairness:** Complaints will be handled objectively and without bias. All parties will be treated with dignity and respect, and decisions will be based on evidence and clear reasoning.
- **Timeliness:** Complaints will be acknowledged promptly and resolved as quickly as possible within defined timelines.
- **Confidentiality:** Complaints will be handled in accordance with MHI's Privacy and Data Protection Policy. Information will only be shared with those who need to know in order to resolve the issue.
- **No Detriment:** Students and staff will not suffer disadvantage, retaliation, or adverse consequences for raising concerns in good faith.
- **Improvement:** Complaints data will be reviewed to identify trends and inform service and policy improvements. Where a complaint reveals systemic issues, MHI will take corrective action.

17. These commitments apply at every stage of the complaints process and guide the institution's expectations for both staff and complainants.

Section 6: Oversight and Confidentiality

18. Complaints are managed within a framework of confidentiality, accountability, and institutional oversight to ensure integrity, fairness, and trust in the process.

Confidentiality

- MHI treats all complaints as confidential unless disclosure is required to investigate the matter or to meet legal obligations (e.g. safeguarding, whistleblowing, or regulatory reporting).
- Information shared in the course of a complaint will only be disclosed to those who need it for fair and lawful resolution.
- Use of shared email accounts (e.g. info@ addresses) for complaints must be governed by restricted access, appropriate forwarding, and oversight by the Academic Registrar.

Oversight Responsibilities

- The Academic Registrar has institutional responsibility for complaints handling, including oversight of procedures, logs, decisions, and training.
- Programme Leaders and relevant line managers are responsible for resolving Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints within their area, escalating to the Academic Registrar when appropriate.
- The Governing Council receives periodic reports on complaints trends, serious or escalated cases, and policy improvements arising from complaints data.

Logging and Reporting

- All formal complaints (Stage 2 and above) are logged in the central complaints register maintained by the Academic Registrar's Office.
- The register includes nature of complaint, outcome, timeframes, and any follow-up actions or learning points.
- Annual summaries of complaints are submitted to the Academic Board and Governing Council to support governance assurance and continuous improvement.

Section 7: Unacceptable Behaviour

19. Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) is committed to treating all complainants with respect and fairness. In return, MHI expects that individuals who raise concerns will do so in a reasonable and respectful manner.

20. While the institution understands that complaints may arise from frustration, dissatisfaction, or distress, behaviour that is aggressive, threatening, abusive, or unreasonably persistent will not be tolerated.

21. Examples of unacceptable behaviour include:

- Aggressive or threatening language, shouting, or intimidation;
- Repeated or excessive contact, especially after the complaint has been addressed;
- Demands for outcomes that are disproportionate, unreasonable, or outside institutional control;
- Personal attacks on staff members or others involved in the complaint process;
- Refusal to accept decisions or continuing to raise the same issue without new evidence.

22. Where behaviour becomes unacceptable:

- The complainant may be warned, restricted to specific communication channels, or assigned an email-only single point of contact;
- In serious cases, the institution may refuse to engage further or take disciplinary action under relevant policies;
- These actions will only be taken as a last resort and must be authorised by the Academic Registrar.

23. Further details are provided in Annex A3: Unacceptable Behaviour Policy (Annex A3 is available for download via the **MHI website (<https://mhi.college/college-policies.php>)** or by request from the Academic Registrar.), which should be read in conjunction with this section.

Part 2: Complaints Procedure

Section 8: Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

24. Wherever possible, Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) encourages concerns to be resolved informally and promptly at the local level, without the need to escalate through the formal complaints process.

What is informal resolution?

25. Informal resolution involves a student or stakeholder raising a concern directly with the staff member, department, or service area involved, and seeking to resolve it through dialogue, clarification, or practical steps. It may also involve mediation or facilitated discussion.

When to use Stage 1

- When the matter is straightforward and has occurred recently;
- When the individual is seeking an explanation, correction, or apology;
- When the individual is willing to speak with the person or team involved;
- When the issue does not require formal investigation or written findings.

Timeframe and process

- Concerns should normally be raised within 20 working days of the issue arising.
- A response should be provided within 10 working days of receipt.
- Staff should aim to resolve the matter fairly and informally, with written confirmation of the outcome where possible.

Support and escalation

- If the concern cannot be resolved informally, or if the complainant feels uncomfortable raising it directly, they may proceed to Stage 2 – Formal Complaint.
- The complainant may seek advice from the Academic Registrar's Office or a nominated complaints advisor before doing so.

Part 2: Operational Framework

Section 9: Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

26. If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, or if the concern is serious or sensitive, the complainant may submit a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this policy.

Submitting a formal complaint

- Formal complaints must be submitted using the Stage 2 Complaint Form (Use Annex A1 which you can request from the Academic Registrar and is also available on line at Annex A1 is available for download via the MHI website (<https://mhi.college/college-policies.php>) or by request from the Academic Registrar.), or by email to complaints@mhi.college, the designated complaints address also available on the MHI website).
- The complaint should be submitted within 20 working days of the original issue or of the outcome of any attempted informal resolution.
- Complainants must clearly describe the issue, provide any supporting evidence, and state the outcome they are seeking.

Acknowledgement and investigation

- The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt.
- A designated investigating officer will be appointed by the Academic Registrar. This may be a programme leader, line manager, or member of the complaints panel not involved in the matter.
- The investigator may meet with the complainant, staff members involved, or others as necessary. All parties will have an opportunity to present their account.

Outcome and response

- A written outcome will normally be provided within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- The response will include a summary of findings, whether the complaint has been upheld or not, and any action to be taken.
- Where a delay is unavoidable, the complainant will be notified with reasons and a revised timeframe.

Record keeping

- All formal complaints are recorded in the central complaints register maintained by the Academic Registrar.
- Information is retained in accordance with MHI's Data Protection and Records Retention Policies.

Section 10: Stage 3 – Appeal

27. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their formal complaint at Stage 2, they may request an appeal under Stage 3 of this procedure.

Grounds for appeal

28. Appeals will only be accepted on one or more of the following grounds:

- Procedural error: The complaint was not handled in accordance with published policy or process;
- New evidence: Significant new information has become available that could not reasonably have been provided earlier;
- Unreasonable outcome: The decision reached was clearly unreasonable or unsupported by the evidence presented.

Submitting an appeal

- Appeals must be submitted using the Stage 3 Appeal Form, Annex A2 (available at Annex A2 is available for download via the **MHI website** <https://mhi.college/college-policies.php> or by request from the Academic Registrar.), or by email to complaints@mhi.college, the designated appeals email address also available on the MHI website) within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome.
- Appeals should be addressed to the Academic Registrar, who will confirm whether the request meets the criteria for review.

Review process

29. If eligible, the appeal will be considered by a senior staff member or complaints panel who was not involved in the original decision.

30. The appeal reviewer may consider the documentation, consult relevant parties, or request additional clarification.

Outcome of appeal

31. A decision will be issued within 15 working days, with one of the following outcomes:

- The original decision is upheld;
- The complaint is upheld in whole or in part, with appropriate remedy or action;
- The matter is referred back for further investigation.
- This outcome represents the final stage of the internal complaints process.
- The complainant will also be advised of their right to escalate the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) if they remain dissatisfied.

Section 11: Final External Review (OIA)

32. If a complainant remains dissatisfied after completing all internal stages of Mortha Halls of Ivy's (MHI) complaints procedure, they may request an external review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

Eligibility for external review

- The OIA can only review complaints from eligible higher education students.
- The internal process at MHI must be fully completed before approaching the OIA.
- A formal outcome letter, known as a Completion of Procedures Letter, will be issued to the complainant upon request at the conclusion of Stage 3 or at a later stage, it is also available on request from the Academic Registrar once the internal complaints process is exhausted

How to submit a complaint to the OIA

- The complaint must be submitted to the OIA within 12 months of receiving the Completion of Procedures Letter.
- Complaints should be submitted using the OIA's online form or by post, along with a copy of the Completion of Procedures Letter.
- Information about eligibility and how to apply is available at: www.oiahe.org.uk

What the OIA can and cannot do

- The OIA reviews whether MHI acted fairly and followed its procedures.
 - The OIA does not usually review academic judgement, offer legal redress, or revisit disciplinary decisions unless due process has been violated.
33. MHI will cooperate fully with OIA investigations and implement any recommendations received through the external review process.



Section 12: Student Support and Representation

34. Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) is committed to ensuring that students who raise complaints are supported throughout the process and are not disadvantaged for doing so.

Right to be accompanied

- A complainant may be accompanied at any meeting or discussion by a person of their choice. This could be:
- A fellow student;
- A family member;
- A staff member not involved in the complaint;
- A recognised student representative.

Support and advice

- Advice and guidance on the complaints process is available from the Academic Registrar's Office.
- Independent advice may also be available through:
 - The Student Council or relevant student bodies;
 - Community or legal advice services (external);
 - The OIA website, which includes examples of good practice and guidance for students.

Accessibility and adjustments

- Reasonable adjustments will be made for students with disabilities or additional needs to ensure that they can access the process fully and fairly.
- Alternative formats (e.g. large print, audio, or translated materials) will be provided on request.

No detriment

- Raising a complaint in good faith will not affect the student's academic standing, future references, or relationship with the institution.
- If any concerns of retaliation arise, students are encouraged to report them immediately to the Academic Registrar.

Section 13: Continuous Improvement and Review

35. Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) regards complaints as a valuable source of feedback and is committed to using them to improve institutional quality, student experience, and service delivery.

Monitoring and reporting

- The Academic Registrar maintains a central complaints register, tracking:
 - Complaint categories and themes;
 - Timeframes for resolution;
 - Outcomes and remedies;
 - Lessons learned and actions taken.
- Trends are analysed annually and reported to:
 - The Academic Board;
 - The Governing Council;
 - Relevant departmental heads and quality assurance leads.

Policy review

36. This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if:

- There are changes in law or regulatory expectations (e.g. OfS or OIA guidance);
- Internal evaluation or student feedback indicates a need for revision;
- Issues arise during the complaints process that suggest clarification or procedural improvement is required.

Continuous improvement actions

37. Where complaints highlight systemic issues, MHI will:

- Investigate root causes;
- Implement targeted changes in policy, staffing, training, or service delivery;
- Communicate improvements to students and staff, where appropriate.



Section 14: Forms and Submission Routes

38. Mortha Halls of Ivy (MHI) provides standard forms for submitting formal complaints and appeals to ensure clarity and consistency.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint Form

39. This form (Annex A1) must be used for all formal complaints that cannot be resolved informally. It includes space for outlining the complaint, attaching evidence, and stating the resolution sought.

Stage 3: Complaint Appeal Form

40. This form (Annex A2) must be used to request an appeal of the Stage 2 decision. It includes defined grounds for appeal and space for new evidence or justification.

Access and Submission

- Both forms will be available for download from the MHI website under the Policies and Student Support section.
- Forms may be submitted:
 - By email to: complaints@mhi.college
 - Through the secure complaints submission portal (if applicable)
 - In person or by post to: Academic Registrar – Confidential

Handling and Privacy

41. Submissions are acknowledged within 5 working days and processed in line with MHI's Data Protection Policy. Records are retained securely and only accessed by authorised staff.