



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. Introduction & Scope	1
2. Overview.....	3
3. STAGE 1: Early Resolution.....	4
4. STAGE 2: Formal Complaint.....	5
5. STAGE 3 – Final Internal Review.....	7
6. STAGE 4: External Review by validating University.....	8
7. STAGE 5: Independent Review	9
8. Complaint regarding a member of CAT staff	9
9. Reporting of Formal Complaints to the Board of Trustees and the Academic Council.....	9
10. Related CAT policies	10
GSE COMPLAINT FORM.....	11
Amendments to April 2020 document v1	15

1. Introduction & Scope

- 1.1. The Graduate School of the Environment (GSE) at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) describes a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction with a service or lack of service provided by CAT.
- 1.2. This complaints procedure operates on the principles of natural justice. CAT conforms to the Advice and Guidance provided by the Quality Assurance Agency, UK Quality Code on: Concerns, Complaints and Appeals.
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/the-quality-code/advice-and-guidance/concerns-complaints-and-appeals>.

CAT also subscribes to the Office for Independent Adjudication for Higher Education (OIAHE), an independent body set up to review student complaints about higher education providers in England and Wales. Our complaints policy follows the best practice guidelines advocated by the OIAHE.

- 1.3. CAT believes it is important that its students feel able to express dissatisfaction to which a response should reasonably be expected. Through the Complaints Procedure, we seek to provide an accessible, fair and straightforward system which enables students to raise concerns, and which ensures an effective, timely and appropriate response.
- 1.4. This document describes the structured procedures whereby students may raise and escalate issues of concern about courses, courses, facilities or services provided by CAT, or about actions, lack of actions or omissions by CAT or its staff.
- 1.5. The procedure provides students with a mechanism to resolve complaints to their satisfaction where it has not been possible to address through informal local discussions. Or where it is apparent that complex and/or multiple issues or issues of a particularly serious nature are involved then these serious concerns can also be considered directly through this complaints procedure.
- 1.6. CAT offers postgraduate master's programmes in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) and the University of East London (UEL). A student on a course at CAT may make use of various University services. The Universities have overarching responsibility for the quality and standards of the academic courses offered by CAT. LJMU and UEL have their own complaints procedures, however CAT students can only seek a review of a complaint from these bodies after **all internal stages (stages 1-3) have been completed** by CAT. Should the complaint regard a service provided by LJMU or UEL please contact a member of CAT such as a member of Academic Staff or the Student Support team in the first instance to receive advice.
- 1.7. This Complaints Procedure is for use by registered CAT students; however, a complaint may also be submitted collectively by a group of students who should nominate a spokesperson who will be the channel of communication for the group. Complaints may not be lodged by a third party on behalf of the complainant.
- 1.8. An ex-student may raise a complaint provided the complaint is raised within two calendar months of the event which has given rise to the complaint.
- 1.9. Students are advised to consider whether there are more suitable ways for them to express the concerns that they have before submitting a complaint. For example, this may be done through Student Representatives at Programme Committees, or through other feedback mechanisms such as module evaluation questionnaires, or students can discuss their concerns informally with the relevant person in the School/Service such as the Programme Leader, Head of School or a member of the Student Support Team.
- 1.10. This Complaints Procedure does not cover the following categories of complaint, for which separate procedures exist:
 - appeals against the decisions of Assessment Boards;
 - appeals against decisions taken under disciplinary proceedings;

- appeals against the decisions of Extenuating circumstances board
 - appeals against the decisions of Sudden and Severe Change of Circumstances applications
 - complaints about businesses operating on CAT premises, but not owned by CAT (contact the Head of School);
 - complaints about the behaviour of other students;
 - appeals against the decisions of Academic Misconduct Panel.
- 1.11. Concerns from students about misconduct, malpractice, bribery, fraud or corruption that are of public interest should be submitted and considered under CATs Antibribery and Corruption Policy. Contact the Head of School or CAT CEO in the first instance.
- 1.12. Matters relating to external companies, such as the Student Finance England or Wales, have their own complaints procedures which should be followed.
- 1.13. This Complaints Procedure recognises the importance of the protection of the rights of those wrongly accused. Malicious or frivolous accusations will be viewed as a serious matter by CAT and could lead to disciplinary action, or legal proceedings.
- 1.14. Reasonable conduct during the Complaints process
- 1.14.1. There are two sides to every dispute therefore it is expected that students, their representatives and staff members should act reasonably and fairly towards each other in good faith and respect this Complaints Procedure in order to reach a timely outcome. All parties are given the opportunity to provide evidence to substantiate their version of the issue or incident. A full disclosure of any allegation will be made to those parties involved in the complaint.
- 1.15. Confidentiality
- 1.15.1. Complaints will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality, with information released only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint or academic appeal. Where it is necessary to obtain information from a third party in relation to the investigation, the third party should only be given as much detail about the complaint as is necessary to obtain the information required from them.

2. Overview

2.1. There are five possible stages described within this Complaints policy:

STAGE 1: Early Resolution

In the first instance, the manager/s of the service or services involved will endeavour to satisfactorily resolve a complaint by informal means.

STAGE 2: Formal Complaint

Where a complaint cannot be resolved informally and/or a complainant wishes to submit a formal complaint, CAT will appoint an appropriate member of staff to conduct a thorough investigation.

STAGE 3: Final Internal Review

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, he/she may request an internal review by the Head of School or other very senior manager at CAT.

STAGE 4: External Review

If the complainant has exhausted the internal procedures at and is not satisfied with the outcome, he/she may refer their complaint to the awarding university (i.e. LJMU or UEL) for external review.

STAGE 5: Independent Review

Where a student remains dissatisfied, they may choose to refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIAHE) for independent review.

3. STAGE 1: Early Resolution

- 3.1. Complainants are asked to make reasonable efforts to resolve their complaint informally for example by meeting with the member of CAT staff most directly concerned with the nature of the complaint. It is recognised that it will not always be possible or practical to hold a face-to-face meeting (e.g. where a complaint is made by an overseas student), and alternative approaches should be considered where necessary.
- 3.2. Complaints concerning the structure or organisation of a programme can normally be effectively dealt with by the relevant Programme Committee. In these cases, the complainant should raise the complaint with their Student Representative or the Programme Leader.
- 3.3. In all cases, complaints should be raised as soon as possible and normally by no later than 10 working days after the failure in the service or the matter giving rise to the complaint. The member of staff receiving the complaint should attempt to resolve the complaint within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. Where the staff member receiving the complaint is not able to deal with the complaint themselves, they should refer it to the Programme Leader as soon as possible.
- 3.4. If a complaint relates to the unprofessional or inappropriate actions or behaviour of a staff member that could potentially bring CAT into disrepute, then the complaint should be referred to the Head of School or Human Resources as soon as possible. The complaint will be dealt with under the procedures in sections 4.7.4 – 4.7.6

- 3.5. Although CAT will always endeavour to satisfactorily resolve a complaint by informal means, it is recognised that this is not always achievable, and the following sections describe the formal complaint and review processes.

4. STAGE 2: Formal Complaint

- 4.1. Where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 and/or otherwise wishes to make a formal complaint, he/she may submit a complaint in writing using the GSE complaints form (appended to this document and available online [HERE](#)).
- 4.2. Students need to provide appropriate and relevant evidence to support any allegations they make (evidence may include signed witness statements, letters, emails and any other relevant information). Covert recordings are not normally allowed to be submitted as evidence. CAT cannot guarantee the return of original documents. Students should retain copies of the complaints form and any documentary evidence they submit
- 4.3. Complainants who have not attempted to resolve their complaint through early resolution (Stage 1) will be asked to explain the reason(s) for this e.g. if there were exceptional circumstances that prevented the early resolution attempt.
- 4.4. Formal complaints should be submitted to the Student Support Manager within 2 calendar months of the matter giving rise to dissatisfaction or within 10 working days of an unresolved informal (Stage 1) complaint.
- 4.5. Late submissions may be progressed if there are exceptional circumstances, however CAT reserves the right not to progress any complaint that is submitted outside of the time limits specified in 4.3.
- 4.6. The Student Support Manager will acknowledge the receipt of completed complaint forms within 5 working days.
- 4.7. If the issues raised on the complaint form can be more appropriately dealt with under a different policy (see 1.8) the complainant will be informed of this and advised how their complaint will be managed thereafter. Under such circumstances the complaint procedure will be terminated.
- 4.8. Investigation of complaint:
- 4.8.1. Completed complaint forms will be referred to the Student Support Manager in the first instance. The Student Support Manager will refer the complaint to the relevant Programme Leader who will appoint or act as the Investigating Officer (IO).
- 4.8.2. The appointed IO will:
- Contact the complainant as soon as reasonably possible to inform them of their appointment as IO and to make arrangements to meet with them where this is necessary or appropriate. A face-to-face meeting is preferred however a video conference call (e.g. Microsoft Teams) or telephone call may be more practical in some circumstances. Complainants should be advised that they are

permitted to be accompanied by a friend or colleague not acting in a legal capacity;

- Identify and undertake investigations as he/she deems appropriate;
- Ask any person or persons who are the subject of or otherwise identified in the complaint to meet with them and/or provide a written statement;
- Keep all other people involved informed on the progress of the investigation. Where the IO is unable to complete their investigation within the required timescale for unavoidable reasons (e.g. witness unavailability) the IO will advise the complainant accordingly.

4.8.3. The IO will conclude their investigations and write to the complainant within 20 working days making clear the grounds on which a decision or settlement has been reached. During periods outside of the academic calendar this timescale may be slightly longer.

4.8.4. If the complaint concerns staffing and/or harassment matters, the IO will consult with HR regarding the appropriate procedure to adopt before investigating. If the complaints form, or any documentation submitted with the form, refer to a named member(s) of staff that member of staff will be entitled to see the complaint and any other information relating to them.

4.8.5. If the IO wishes to interview a member of CAT staff in relation to a complaint under the terms of section 4.7.4, the staff member should be advised that they are permitted to be accompanied by a friend or colleague not acting in a legal capacity.

4.8.6. If the IO considers that there is sufficient evidence for the case to proceed under the staff disciplinary procedure, the case will cease to be handled through the complaints procedure and will be passed to HR to pursue. The complainant will be notified of this decision; the complainant will not be disadvantaged by this decision.

4.8.7. In concluding their investigation the IO may make one of the following decisions within the procedures laid down by CAT and under the rules of natural justice:

- to dismiss the complaint;
- to suggest an amicable settlement to the complainant and member of staff if appropriate. If this is not mutually accepted within five working days, then the IO shall make a decision under (a) or (c) of this section. If the settlement is accepted, the procedure terminates at this stage;

- to find the complaint justified and make an offer of redress to the complainant, e.g. an apology and/or appropriate recommendations to CAT.

5. STAGE 3 – Final Internal Review

- 5.1. Where a complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 2 outcome, he/she should notify the Stage 2 Investigating Officer of this within 10 working days, explaining why he/she is not satisfied with the outcome.
- 5.2. Complainants may request a review of their formal complaint where they believe and can substantiate that:
 - the formal complaint procedure has not been followed correctly and/or
 - the formal complaint has not been appropriately addressed and/or
 - the decision regarding the outcome of their formal complaint is unreasonable in all the circumstances.
- 5.3. Where an internal review is requested the complaint file will be forwarded to the Head of School in the first instance. Depending upon the nature of the complaint and previous investigations undertaken, the Head of School may be conflicted and should ask another senior manager or the CAT CEO to undertake the review. In exceptional circumstances a Trustee of CAT may be asked to ensure a review is undertaken impartially.
- 5.4. Within 10 working days of receipt of the request, the Head of School (or appointed reviewer) will decide whether there is sufficient evidence for the case to be further examined, provided that:
 - there is, at the time, still a complaint which comes under the scope of this procedure;
 - the complainant's desired outcome to the complaint is achievable;
 - the complaint was lodged within the set time limit.
- 5.5. If there is insufficient evidence for the case to be reconsidered, the complainant shall receive a written statement explaining the reasons for this. The complainant at this stage has completed the internal procedures at CAT and may request for the case to be reviewed by their awarding university, in accordance with their own policy and procedures (see Stage 4).
- 5.6. Where there is sufficient evidence for the case to be further examined, the Head of School (or appointed reviewer) may consider the possibility of a mediatory meeting with the parties involved at Stage 2 of the procedure. If the meeting is successful, the complainant and other party will be informed of the outcome in writing within 10 working days. When an attempt to achieve a resolution through mediation is unsuccessful or would appear to be inappropriate, the Head of School (or appointed reviewer) will undertake a review of stages 1 and 2 as appropriate.
- 5.7. The Head of School (or appointed reviewer) may request a meeting with the complainant and any witnesses to further consider and adjudicate on the

complaint. If required, such meetings shall normally be held within 20 working days of the review notification.

- 5.8. The complainant is permitted to be accompanied by a friend such as a fellow CAT student, student representative, or family member during any interview, however the supporter is not permitted to speak on behalf of the complainant or other witnesses. The complainant must inform the IO of any friends' presence at least 1 day prior to the meeting taking place, so that arrangements can be made.

- 5.8.1. Whilst the complaint is being investigated the complainant, friend and investigating officer from CAT should respect the privacy and confidentiality of any individuals involved in the event or investigation. Equally there should be no discussion of the incident outside of the investigation until the outcome of the review – see section 1.13.

- 5.9. The outcome of the internal review and the reasons for the decision will be communicated to the complainant within 10 working days of the final meeting or within 1 calendar month of the review notification if no further meetings have been held. The decision of the Head of School (or appointed reviewer) is final and binding, although if the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision, they have recourse to refer their complaint to their awarding university (see Stage 4).

- 5.10. If the complaint is upheld the Head of School (or appointed reviewer) will notify the CAT CEO / Trustees of the outcome stating what action has been taken or is proposed in the light of their decision and review findings.

- 5.11. The Head of School (or appointed reviewer) will notify the Complainant of any action taken and proposed further action.

6. STAGE 4: External Review by validating University

- 6.1. Complaints on matters related to an academic programme should first be pursued in accordance with GSE's complaints policy and procedures (Stages 1 – 3). If, following completion of those procedures, a student considers the outcome to be unsatisfactory, they can request a review of that outcome by the validating University, subject to establishing the necessary grounds for a review.

- 6.2. UEL students may submit a request for external review within one calendar month of the student receiving written confirmation from CAT of the final outcome of their complaint. Further details are available via the UEL website: <https://uel.ac.uk/about/governance/student-appeals>.

- 6.3. LJMU students are expected to submit a request within 15 calendar days of the student receiving written confirmation from CAT of the final outcome of their complaint. Further details are available via the LJMU website: <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/-/media/sample-sharepoint-libraries/policy-documents/243.pdf>.

7. STAGE 5: Independent Review

- 7.1. If the complainant has exhausted the internal procedures at Stage 4 and is not satisfied with the outcome, he/she may request that the case is reviewed by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE) which is an independent body.
- 7.2. Information and eligibility rules are available at: www.oiahe.org.uk
- 7.3. A report on the findings of cases considered by the Independent Adjudicator shall be received by CAT's Academic Council at least annually.

8. Complaint regarding a member of CAT staff

- 8.1. If a complaint relates to the unprofessional or inappropriate actions or behaviour of any CAT staff member that could potentially bring CAT into disrepute, then the complaint should be referred to the Head of School or Human Resources as soon as possible. The complaint will be dealt with under the procedures in sections 4.8.4 – 4.8.6. If necessary the complaint may be considered under CATs safeguarding policy.
- 8.2. If a complaint has been made about a member of staff by a student, it is CAT's duty to ensure that its staff are treated fairly throughout the process. The member of staff will be informed if a complaint has been made about them. Any member of staff mentioned in a complaint will not be treated less favourably by CAT than if the complaint had not been brought, pending the outcomes of any investigation. The Complaints Procedure itself cannot be used to discipline members of staff, but is a mechanism to initiate formal investigation through Human Resources.

9. Reporting of Formal Complaints to the Board of Trustees and the Academic Council

- 9.1. The Head of School shall report annually to the Board of Trustees and quarterly to the Academic Council on formal complaints received.
- 9.2. The report will include: the number of formal complaints lodged; the number satisfactorily addressed at Stage 2; the number of complaints that proceed to Stage 3; and the number proceeding to external review. Data concerning equal opportunities monitoring shall also be provided.
- 9.3. Any overall recommendation(s) arising from the reviews will be drawn to the attention of the Board of Trustees and the Academic Council.
- 9.4. An annual summary report of student complaints made to UEL or LJMU against CAT will be retained by the University.

10. Related CAT policies

- 10.1. **Student Disciplinary Regulations and Procedures**
- 10.2. **Equal Opportunities Statement**
- 10.3. **Fitness to Study**
- 10.4. **Student Charter**

GSE COMPLAINT FORM

An online version of this form is available [HERE](#)

This form can be used by a student or graduate of the Graduate School of the Environment (GSE) to complain about any service or lack of service provided by the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) to which a formal response is expected.

Please return the completed form to: student.support@cat.org.uk or by post to:

The Student Support Manager
WISE Building
Centre for Alternative Technology
Llwyngwern Quarry
Machynlleth
Powys
SY20 9AZ

SECTION ONE – YOUR DETAILS

SURNAME		TITLE	
FORENAMES(S)			
STUDENT NUMBER			
PROGRAMME OF STUDY			
ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE			
POSTCODE			
EMAIL ADDRESS			
DAYTIME TELEPHONE			
If you have a registered disability or learning difficulty that is relevant to the issues raised in this complaint, please provide brief details.	<i>Please contact the Student Support team if you require any assistance with completing this form</i>		

SECTION TWO – YOUR COMPLAINT

Which service, department or persons are this complaint about?	
If this complaint is regarding an incident or lack of service, please state the date(s) this occurred	
Have you attempted to resolve your complaint informally (i.e. Stage 1 of the complaints procedure)? If not, please state the reasons why	
Please provide name(s) of any staff members you have spoken to regarding your complaint.	
Please provide a statement of any actions that you have taken to help resolve this complaint	

If applicable, please explain why the resolution or action proposed or taken following your initial notification of the complaint has been inadequate.

Please summarise how you would like to see your complaint resolved

SECTION THREE – SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Please list and briefly describe any supporting evidence. If available, please provide a copy of the email or letter confirming the outcome of your complaint at Stage 1.

If submitting multiple emails or documents as evidence, please ensure that they are numbered and can be easily identified. To enable the investigation to be undertaken in a timely manner please include all the evidence you wish to be taken into consideration.

SECTION FOUR – DECLARATION

Please sign and date below to confirm the information you have provided on this form is accurate to the best of your knowledge.

PRINT FULL NAME			
SIGNED		DATE	

Complaints require an investigation to enable resolution. Anonymous complaints will not normally be accepted; complaints that are not made openly cannot be investigated in keeping with the principles of natural justice.

For practical reasons therefore, normally no action will be taken in the event of complaints made anonymously. However, provision of supporting evidence may help should CAT decide to take it forward.

Exceptions to this may be made where the complaint raises serious issues of concern for the health and safety of students, staff and the general public.

CAT expects that students will not submit false statements, falsified evidence or frivolous or vexatious complaints. Malicious or vexatious accusations will be viewed as a serious matter by CAT and could lead to disciplinary action, or legal proceedings.

The information contained within this form and any supporting documents will be treated in accordance with our [Privacy Notice](#).

For Office Use Only

Received By:	
Date received:	
Date acknowledged	
Further Actions	

Amendments to April 2020 document v1

Minor typographical changes made for clarity

1.2 reference made to the QAA Quality Code on Concerns Complaints and Appeals.

1.2 and 7.1 OIA renamed Office for Independent Adjudication for Higher Education (OIAHE)

Added sections 1.4 and 1.5 – additional information regarding the purpose of the procedure

1.6 Additional clarification regarding the role of LJMU and UEL in the Complaints procedure

1.7 Extenuating circumstances and Sudden and Severe Change of Circumstances applications added to list of categories the complaints policy doesn't cover.

1.8 Additional clause added to allow ex-students to make a complaint which occurred at the end of their studies

1.11 Complaints relating to Bribery and Corruption

1.12 Complaints involving external parties

1.13 Reasonable Behaviour during complaint

1.14 Statement regarding confidentiality

4.2 Requirements for evidence to support the complaint

5. Stage 3 renamed FINAL internal review

5.8 Arrangements for a supporter for the complainant in any interview during the investigation.

6.2 UEL Appeals document webpage updated

6.3 LJMU Appeals document webpage updated

8.4 Record of complaints against CAT by validating Universities

9. Related CAT policies

Date Document Approved: May 2023

By: Academic Council

To be reviewed by: April 2026