



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

# **STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY**



## 1 Introduction and Scope

- 1.1 The Institute of Ismaili Studies (the IIS) is committed to providing the highest quality educational experience for all students, from their first interaction with the Institute, when making enquiries about studying on one of our programmes and throughout their journey with us as a student. For the purposes of clarity, the generic term “student” will be used throughout this document, as the policy applies at any stage of the student’s journey.
- 1.2 This aspiration of providing consistently high quality services is reflected in all our academic, pastoral and support services. We welcome queries and feedback from students about any aspect of our services and we will use this feedback to drive improvement and enhance our students’ educational experience.
- 1.3 However, we also acknowledge that students will sometimes wish to make a complaint, and the management of complaints forms a key part of our quality assurance process. In such a situation we will do everything possible to respond to the complaint quickly and to resolve the issue as informally and as effectively as possible.
- 1.4 This policy outlines the process that students should follow to make a complaint and the process that the IIS will follow to achieve an effective resolution.
- 1.5 This policy applies to prospective and registered students who wish to make an academic or non-academic complaint against other students, employees, visitors or volunteers. It proposes a single process which will be followed to manage the investigation and resolution of all student complaints.
- 1.6 The policy applies to all taught postgraduate provision directly administered by the Department of Graduate Studies (DGS). Agreements with external providers who administer part or all of a postgraduate programme belonging to but not directly administered by DGS may specify alternative arrangements for student complaints; in such cases, the policy of the external provider shall supersede this policy.
- 1.7 Complaints from third parties e.g. parents, as well as anonymous complaints, cannot be accepted.
- 1.8 This policy does not deal with **academic appeals**. An academic appeal is a request for a review of a decision or decisions made on student assessment, exam results or award classification or progression to another post-graduate programme. The distinction between an academic appeal and an academic complaint is important to ensure the issue you have is dealt with in the most appropriate way and that this policy and process do not interfere with the operation of academic judgement. Please refer to the student handbook for Academic Appeals.



- 1.9 **Accessibility:** If you need this document in a different format, please contact the Senior Education Programmes Officer or Departmental Administrator.

## 2 Type of Complaints

- 2.1 A complaint is the expression of specific concern or dissatisfaction about the Institute's action or lack of action on an issue, about the service provided by the Institute or about any other matter affecting a student's welfare, wellbeing or their overall experience at the IIS.
- 2.2 Examples of **academic complaints** might concern the quality of teaching, the level of and quality of supervision, the quality of feedback or the administration of the academic programme.
- 2.3 **Non-academic complaints** might concern the provision of misleading or incorrect information, provision of facilities or services and alleged discrimination or bullying or a failure of the IIS to follow its own policies and processes.
- 2.4 A complaint may involve other students or employees of the Institute and may be expressed verbally or in writing if in the first instance it only appears to require an informal approach to bring it to a resolution. If the complaint is more serious, if the student is dissatisfied with the response at the informal stage, or if it has not been possible to resolve the complaint informally, the complaint should be submitted in writing in order to be considered at the formal stage.
- 2.5 Any complaint that relates to bullying and / or harassment, discrimination, equality of whistleblowing will be treated as a formal complaint under this policy.
- 2.6 Prospective students should direct any complaint about the Admissions process to the following address: [dgs-hod@iis.ac.uk](mailto:dgs-hod@iis.ac.uk). However, please note that the judgement of the Admissions Committee cannot be appealed against.
- 2.7 Where there is any uncertainty about whether a complaint should be classed as an academic appeal or a complaint, a decision will be made by the Head of the Department of Graduate Studies (DGS) in consultation with the Head of Quality Assurance & Evaluation (QA&E) and the Co-Director.

## 3 Underlying Principles

- 3.1 This policy has been created in accordance with the Quality Code of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and guidance from the Competition and Market Authority (CMA) on handling complaints, to ensure compliance with consumer protection law and that good practice is observed.



- 3.2 This policy provides a clear, transparent and effective route to complaint resolution and is readily available via the student handbook and prospectus, on the IIS website and on Moodle and will be reviewed and updated annually.
- 3.3 All complaints will be treated fairly and impartially and the process is designed to focus on resolving complaints rather than apportioning blame. All parties involved will be kept informed of the progress of the complaint at regular and appropriate intervals during the process.
- 3.4 The issues relating to any complaint will be kept confidential and information will only be shared with any students or employees on a need to know basis.
- 3.5 Every attempt will be made to resolve issues informally and as quickly as possible. Should a complaint be dealt with through the formal process, the complainant has the right to be accompanied to an investigation or panel meeting by a fellow student, friend or relative. Please note that anyone who accompanies a complainant to such a meeting should do so as an observer, unless requested to contribute by the panel.
- 3.6 This process is not a legal one. It serves as a formal, internal process against which the IIS can be assessed as having applied its regulations and fulfilled its duty of care to deliver services to students satisfactorily; that it investigates complaints robustly and fairly, and that it makes decisions and takes actions that are reasonable and proportionate. Under this policy, therefore, students are not entitled to legal representation at complaints hearings and appeals.
- 3.7 All complaints are taken seriously, will be investigated appropriately and can be made without fear of victimisation. However, repeated and unwarranted complaints or the vexatious or malicious use of the Student Complaints Policy may result in disciplinary action against the student.
- 3.8 An annual review of the Student Complaints Policy, processes and outcomes will be undertaken by the Head of Quality Assurance & Evaluation (QA&E), in consultation with the Academic Management Committee (AMC), to monitor effectiveness and ensure that the Institute is able to address the root causes of problems, to learn from complaints made, ensure the same complaints do not reoccur and to improve our students' educational experience.
- 3.9 The IIS recognises the importance of responding to complaints as quickly as possible in the interests of fairness and to manage the expectations of all parties affected. Whilst every effort will be made to adhere to the timescales given in this policy, where they do slip due to staff absence or operational difficulties, new timescales will be communicated to the student. All complaints will be closed within the deadline of 90 days set by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.



## 4 Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- 4.1 In the first instance students should raise their complaint with the respective Programme Leader, Academic Advisor or Student Services Manager. If, however, the complaint is against one of these individuals, students should address their complaint to the Head of DGS. The complaint will then be forwarded to the most appropriate person in the department, with the aim of the complaint being resolved within the department if at all possible.
- 4.2 Every attempt will be made to resolve and /or respond to your complaint within 10 working days. You will be advised if this timescale needs to be extended because of the planned absence of key individuals.

## 5 Stage 2: Making a Formal Complaint

- 5.1 With all complaints, informal resolution will be sought. However, if the student is not satisfied with the outcome at stage 1; if the complaint relates to bullying and / or harassment, discrimination, equality or whistleblowing or if the complaint is against a Head of Department, a formal complaint should be raised. Complaints should be made in writing to the Head of QA&E at [studentcomplaints@iis.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@iis.ac.uk).
- 5.2 A complaint should be made as soon as possible after the incident / issue which gives rise to the complaint has occurred, but cannot be accepted after a period of 15 working days has lapsed. The complaint will be managed in accordance with the version of the policy which is current when the complaint is submitted, regardless of the time of the incident / issue.
- 5.3 The student will be asked to provide the following information:
- basic details about the complaint, what happened and when;
  - how it has affected them;
  - whether there are any witnesses or supporting evidence;
  - what they have done to try and achieve informal resolution;
  - what they would like the Institute to do to sort things out; and
  - their contact details and preference for the way in which the IIS should communicate with them.
- 5.4 The student complaint will be acknowledged within two working days, investigated within 10 working days, and every attempt will be made to communicate the outcome to the student within 15 working days of the complaint being submitted. If this is not possible e.g. because the complaint is raised during the holiday period, they will be informed and an indicative timescale for resolution will be given to them.



- 5.5 When any complaint is submitted, the student will be asked what they would ideally like the outcome to be. Redress might be an oral or written apology; a change to information provided by the IIS or a process to improve accuracy or accessibility; the offer of mediation to repair relationships etc. Whilst the IIS will take any such views into consideration in the resolution of the issue, this information is, nevertheless, given without prejudice to the final remedy determined by the complaints panel. If the complaint is not upheld, you will be given the reason for the decision.

## **6 The Investigation**

- 6.1 All formal complaints will be subject to an appropriate investigation process, to ascertain the full facts and circumstances surrounding the issue and this may include interviews with the relevant parties, obtaining any witness statements etc. The Head of QA&E will appoint an independent Investigating Officer from amongst a pool of managers (Deputy Heads of Department, Heads of Unit or senior managers) and academics who have been trained to fulfil this role. Where appropriate, a suitably qualified external Investigating Officer will be appointed. This will ensure robustness and consistency of approach across the Institute.
- 6.2 The student has the right be accompanied to any formal investigation meeting by a fellow student, friend or relative. Please note that anyone who accompanies the student to such a meeting should do so as an observer, unless requested to contribute by the panel. The student is required to give the IIS at least two days' written notice of the name of the peer or friend that will accompany them.

## **7 The Panel Meeting**

- 7.1 Following the investigation, the Head of QA&E, who will act as Chair, will convene a complaints panel consisting of the Head of DGS, or another independent Head of Department if the Head of DGS was involved at stage 1, and an independent Head of Unit or academic. The appointment of panel members will be made with the aim of achieving an appropriate balance of expertise and diversity.
- 7.2 The panel will consider the investigation report, witness statements or other evidence and any other relevant information and may interview the student and the respondent to ensure a full understanding of the issues in order to come to a majority decision regarding the outcome. The outcome and proposed remedy will be supported by a rationale and will be communicated in writing to by the Chair of the panel.
- 7.3 In the event of the complaint being upheld, the Institute will refund on production of relevant receipts, any incidental expenses such as travel, subsistence and accommodation costs, where the Institute is satisfied that they were necessarily incurred and that the amounts claimed are



reasonable. If the student is in any doubt about the acceptability of an expense, they should contact the Student Services Manager for advice.

## 8 Stage 3: The Appeal Process

- 8.1 If a student is dissatisfied with the investigation undertaken or the outcome of the formal complaints process, they have the right of appeal. The appeal must be sent in writing by email to the PA of the Co-Director ([darpa@iis.ac.uk](mailto:darpa@iis.ac.uk)) within 20 working days of receipt of the outcome letter. It will be acknowledged within two working days and an appeal meeting will be arranged.
- 8.2 The Head of QA&E, in consultation with the Co-Director, will appoint an Appeal Panel comprising (a) an independent Head or Deputy Head of Department as Chair, with (b) two additional senior managers or academics to hear the appeal.
- 8.3 The panel will meet within 20 working days of receipt of the appeal, having reviewed all the information available, including the investigation report, any witness statements or other evidence and any notes taken at the complaints panel meeting. They will make a majority decision whether or not to uphold the appeal and the Chair will then confirm their decision to the student in writing

## 9 External Redress

- 9.1 The IIS' decision in respect of **non-academic complaints** shall be final, save and except that students may petition SOAS for a procedural review of the handling by the Institution of the matter once all internal levels of appeal at the Institution have been exhausted. SOAS shall not have jurisdiction in such matters and will only have limited powers to review the matter which shall not include overturning the decision made by the IIS but shall include acting in an advisory capacity to the IIS.
- 9.2 In respect of **academic complaints**, following the IIS' decision, students shall have a right of appeal to the Appeal Officer of SOAS. The procedures used by the Appeals Officer shall be those of SOAS, and the decision of the Appeals Officer shall be final and binding on all parties. Having exhausted SOAS' internal procedures and subject to the provision of the legislation, the student has the right to request the OIA to review his or her case.

## 10 Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

- 10.1 Once the IIS' Complaints Procedure has been completed, the IIS will issue a Completion of Procedures Letter, informing the student that the internal procedure of the IIS has been



exhausted and of their right to submit a complaint to the OIA in accordance with guidance from the OIA. The OIA provides an independent scheme for the review of student grievances under the Higher Education Act 2004. Further information can be found on their website (<https://www.oiahe.org.uk>). At the end of the IIS' Appeals Procedure, the student has the right to submit a request for the IIS' decision to be reviewed by the OIA.

- 10.2 The OIA Complaint Form must be received by the OIA within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter.

## 11 Monitoring of the Complaints Process

- 11.1 This Complaints Policy, the procedure, and the outcomes of any complaints submitted will be monitored and an annual report on the preceding 12 months' activity will be produced by the Head of QA&E, in consultation with the AMC, for the SOAS and IIS Joint Programme Committee, the DGS Oversight Committee Group and the OIA to review.

## 12 Document Control

Version	Role / Activity	Person(s) responsible	Date
Version 1	Document Owner and Author	Head of HR, Head of QA&E	April 2018
	Reviewer	AMC	May 2018
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