

Complaints Procedure

1. Introduction

The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn is committed to providing a high-quality service and an environment in which all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. In order to do this, we need to be told when we get things wrong and if there is a complaint, to deal with it quickly, fairly and consistently.

We listen to all complaints, treat them seriously and learn from them so that we can continuously improve our service.

We recognise that many concerns will be raised informally and dealt with quickly. An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. But if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

2. Definition and Scope

We treat a complaint as an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction with our service from a third party, which calls for a response.

This procedure does not apply to complaints made by individuals concerning barristers or their employees. If an individual wishes to make a complaint of this nature, they should refer to their barrister's own complaints procedure. This procedure does apply to members of any Inn who are working with or supporting the Inn's Education Department in its activities. Employees of the Inn should refer to the Staff Handbook, if they have a concern, problem, or complaint about their work, the workplace, or someone they work with.

If the complaint is not one which can be dealt with via the Inn the individual will be advised of this as soon as possible and informed of the body to which they should report it e.g. the Bar Standards Board, the Inns' Conduct Committee, etc.

Any issue relating to data protection infringements or breaches, no matter how small or informal, should be brought to the attention of the [Director of Finance](#)).

3. Harassment

Any complaints of harassment will be dealt with by *The Inns of Court Anti-Harassment Policy*, a [copy of which is available on the website](#) or can be made available on request.

4. Confidentiality

Every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and the Inn maintain confidentiality throughout. However, the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (with each complaint judged on its own merit). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

5. Monitoring and Reporting:

Anonymised records will be kept of all formal complaints received, investigations and subsequent outcomes. These records can be used by the Inn to inform relevant Committees and members of any patterns and to improve our service. Additionally, where appropriate, these anonymised reports and analysis of complaints may be shared with the Bar Standards Board.

6. Raising Concerns and Complaints

There are two pathways available to an individual wishing to make a complaint - Informal or Formal.

In all cases, initial contact should be made with a designated Inn employee, as soon as reasonably possible after the incident. This can be done face to face, by telephone or by email. Contact details can be found on the [Policies](#) page of the Inn's website.

We ask that individuals clearly set out details of their complaint, the consequences as a result, and the remedy they are seeking.

In all cases, the complainant will receive a written acknowledgement from the Inn, within five working days of their complaint being received. This acknowledgement will detail the complaint handling procedure (i.e. either informal or formal) and will provide approximate timelines. If the formal procedure is to be followed, this will also confirm the investigating officer appointed, expectations for the investigation and future responses.

7. Informal Complaints

Complaints are more easily resolved if dealt with at an early stage and the majority will be. These are referred to as informal complaints. Such instances include where an investigation is not required because the nature of the complaint is clear, and where the issues raised are straightforward and potentially easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation.

The Inn will take every opportunity to resolve complaints following the informal procedure, where feasible and possible.

Individuals can choose to make their complaint formal, if they so wish, by following the process outlined in Section 8 below.

7.1 Informal Complaints Procedure

The complainant will receive a written acknowledgement, within five working days of the complaint being received, confirming that it will be dealt with under the informal complaints handling procedure.

Complainants will receive a subsequent response to their complaint within the next ten working days.

If the resolution is not to their satisfaction, the complainant will be offered the option of progressing their complaint to the formal stage.

8. Formal Complaints

In the case that an individual wishes to make their complaint formal or their complaint is unable to be resolved at the informal stage (and requires further investigation), the formal complaints procedure will be initiated.

8.1 Formal Complaints Procedure

To make a formal complaint, an individual should contact one of the [designated Inn employees](#). Within this notification, individuals should outline that they wish the formal process and an investigation into the complaint be initiated.

If their complaint is about the Under Treasurer, an individual should alert the Chair of the [Management Committee](#), directly. Contact details for the Chair can be obtained from the [Inn's Reception](#).

The complainant should provide written details of their complaint including as much detail as possible to allow an investigation.

On receipt of a formal complaint, if it is one which can be dealt with by the Inn, a case will be opened and undertaken by the Under Treasurer or another designated employee ('the investigator'), appointed by the Under Treasurer. If the Under Treasurer is conflicted, a member of the Management Committee, appointed by the Chair, will be asked to undertake the investigation.

The complainant will receive a written acknowledgement from the Inn, within five days of their formal complaint being received. This acknowledgement will detail the formal complaint handling procedure; provide approximate timelines; the investigator appointed, and expectations for the investigation and future responses.

8.2 Investigation

The investigator will gather all necessary documents and information to make an independent and impartial review of the complaint. If internal interviews are to be conducted, notes of the interview will be written up and signed by the interviewer and interviewee prior to them being added to the complaint records. This will be undertaken as quickly and fairly as possible.

Once the complaint has been investigated in full, the investigator will examine all of the evidence and review the findings with another, impartial, Inn employee designated for this purpose. Once a decision has been reached, the investigator will draft a final response letter to the complainant with their findings and decision regarding any action(s) to be taken. Whilst the response will be provided in writing; it will also be delivered directly at a meeting with the complainant where possible.

The Inn's aim is to resolve all matters as quickly as possible. However, inevitably some issues will be more complex and therefore may require longer to be fully investigated. Consequently, there are no set timescales given for handling and responding to complaints. If a matter requires more detailed investigation, complainants will receive an interim response describing what is being done to deal with the matter, and when a full reply can be expected and from whom.

8.3 Appeal

If the complainant is not satisfied with the initial response to their complaint, following the formal procedure, then they may ask for their complaint and the response to be further reviewed. A suitable Inn employee, not involved in the case to date, will be appointed to undertake this review.

Details of how and who to submit this request will be included in a final response letter. Complainants should expect an acknowledgement of their request within five working days, and a final response, normally, within 10 working days.

There is no further appeal stage.

9. Formal Complaint Procedure (Student Members)

In the case of a formal complaint against a student member, an investigation will be carried out in the same way as for other members of the Inn.

If the investigation finds that the complaint is well-founded, regardless of whether it is admitted or disputed by the subject of the complaint, the matter will be referred to the Inns' Conduct Committee (ICC) for determination.

For matters disputed by the student member the Inn has the burden of proof and must present evidence in support of the allegation in accordance with the ICC's "Disputed Facts Protocol". The complainant will be kept informed throughout this process and may be called to give evidence to the ICC.

Appendix 1 – Complaints Procedure Flow Chart

