Student Complaints Policy

1. Context

1.1 This policy sets out the approach Walbrook takes to managing a complaint from a student. A complaint is where you are dissatisfied with an aspect of your experience while studying with Walbrook.

1.2 Examples of circumstances that may lead to a complaint include but are not limited to:

i If Walbrook has not met its obligations set out in the programme handbook or in policies that support the learning and student experience

ii A concern about the delivery of the programme, the supporting services or the facilities and online platforms

iii If you consider that you have been given misleading or incorrect information in promotional information published by Walbrook.

1.3 The following policies should be used in other circumstances:

i Appeals Policy: if you wish to appeal a decision made by a formal board or panel that is considering your individual circumstances.

ii Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy: if you have experienced these behaviours.

iii Student Misconduct and Disciplinary Policy: for all other misconduct behaviours.

1.4 Walbrook will provide guidance to you if you are unsure of which policy to use, or if another policy would be more appropriate to investigate the issues you wish to raise.

Any HE student registered with Walbrook can make a complaint. A complaint can also be made by a student who has recently left Walbrook, normally within three months of leaving.

2. Principles

2.1 The Policy principles are as follows:

i Each complaint will be managed fairly, consistently and transparently and in accordance with the Walbrook Equality and Diversity Policy

ii Timescales for submitting and processing a complaint will be made clear and Walbrook will update you about any delay and the reason behind it.

iii A flexible and logical approach will be taken to any crossover between a complaint and an appeal made by you.

iv Walbrook will ensure that any Reasonable Adjustments required you are accommodated into the complaints process.

v We will not accept frivolous or vexatious complaints and will take action under the Student Misconduct and Disciplinary Policy if these occur.

vi You will have recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator if you are dissatisfied with the way in which we have managed a complaint within Walbrook.

vii The principles set out above will apply to Higher Education provision delivered solely by Walbrook or through collaborative provision.

viii All students and staff engaging in a complaint are expected to act with courtesy and respect to each other, and the complaints process may be temporarily halted if any unreasonable behaviours occur. Disciplinary policies will be used where behaviour does not comply with Walbrook expectations.

3. Student Support

3.1 This document is designed to be as clear as possible to explain how complaints are managed. Further support and guidance is available from Student Support and advice is available from the Quality, Policy and Regulation Team for staff who are involved in the process.

4. Crossover of a complaint and an appeal

4.1 Issues raised in complaint may cross over with matters that would more usually be considered as an appeal. Walbrook takes an individual approach to these situations to work through the most efficient and appropriate way to manage a case and to align with relevant policies. This may mean that all issues are dealt with as one case, or that we separate them out and consider them through separate relevant policies.

4.2 Walbrook takes a similarly flexible approach if you submit a complaint and already have a separate case (e.g. an appeal) underway.

4.3 We will always inform you of the approach we plan to take to case management where a crossover of concerns occurs.

5. Group Complaints

5.1 Students may decide to submit a group complaint where several of them are affected by the same issue.

5.2 Where students submit a group complaint, Walbrook will either correspond with each member of the group separately or may require the group to nominate a representative with whom we will communicate. Any student considering joining a group complaint should always ensure that they are seeking the same outcome before deciding to be part of the group. If a student is seeking a different outcome, or if there is a possibility that they may seek a different outcome, they should submit an individual complaint.

6. Anonymous complaints

6.1 You can make an anonymous complaint. However, we are unlikely to be able to investigate the issue/s you raise because we would not be able to conduct a full investigation without talking to you. You will not be disadvantaged by Walbrook by raising a complaint other than if you submit a complaint vexatiously, maliciously or on knowingly false grounds; in those instances, we may take disciplinary action. We strongly encourage you to talk to a member of staff if, despite this assurance, you have a complaint that you do not feel you can raise without doing so anonymously.

7. Raising a complaint

7.1 A complaint should be made as soon as possible of the incident or issue occurring, and ideally within 14 calendar days. Complaints raised beyond three months will normally only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.

7.2 Walbrook aims to resolve your complaint informally, wherever possible. This means that you can raise your concern verbally or by email with the appropriate team to find a resolution. It may be necessary for the member of staff to undertake some investigation before the matter can be concluded.

7.3 We aim to resolve all informal complaints within 14 calendar days.

7.4 Informal resolution will not always be the most appropriate route for a complaint to be investigated. This includes where:

i. The impact of the concern on you is major. For example, this could include situations where you have encountered repeated poor experiences, or where a one-off experience has resulted in a significant negative impact. The Student Support Team can provide advice if you are uncertain about whether you should follow the informal resolution route (see above) or the formal route (see Section 8).

Or

ii. Informal resolution has been used but has not resulted in an outcome that is satisfactory to you.

7.5 In either of these situations, a formal complaint should be submitted by you.

8. Consideration of formal complaints

i A formal complaint should be submitted by completing the Complaint form, and should only be submitted after you have first tried to resolve your complaint informally with the relevant team. On the complaint form you will be asked to provide information about the nature of the complaint, any supporting evidence and the outcome that you would like to see.

8.2 Walbrook would normally expect you to submit a complaint directly. We will only accept a complaint on your behalf (e.g. by a family member) in exceptional circumstances where, for example, you have significant poor health. In those circumstances, we would require you to provide your permission in writing to Walbrook for that other person to act on your behalf. We would subsequently:

i Copy all correspondence to you unless you have specifically asked for this not to happen.

ii Expect you to engage in the process so that there can be full consideration of the issues raised, including Walbrook meeting with you as needs be.

iii Consider if there needs to be an extension to the timescale for processing the complaint, for example, if you are in significant poor health. Such extension will normally only take place if there is evidence that you are receiving support for your circumstances.

8.3 Walbrook would not normally expect you to engage a legal representative to act on your behalf or accompany you to any meeting. Legal representation at a complaint hearing would only be appropriate in very exceptional circumstances, and the involvement of a legal representative has potential to change the nature of the procedure or delay the process. However, where you request to use a legal representative, Walbrook will carefully consider whether it would be reasonable in the particular circumstances of the case to allow you to do so.

9. Process for considering a formal complaint

9.1 A complaint will be reviewed by the Designated Complaints Officer and Walbrook will normally notify you within 7 calendar days of receiving the submission that:

i The complaint is rejected because it does not have any substance. You can ask for a review of a rejection decision

Or

ii That the complaint will move to the next stage.

9.2 Where the process moves to the next stage, a Designated Complaints Officer will investigate the complaint. This process will involve corresponding with you, talking with

member/s of staff relevant to the issue/s that have been raised in the complaint, meeting any other relevant people (e.g. witnesses) and reviewing any other relevant information. The findings of the investigation will be collated in a case file that is proportionate to the issues raised.

9.3 The case file will then be considered by the Complaints and Appeals Panel. The composition of the Complaints and Appeals Panel is:

i Provost (Chair) or nominee

ii Nominee of the Regulatory Compliance Working Group

iii Nominees of Academic Board x2

iv Designated Complaints and Appeals Officer

9.4 Panel members will have relevant experience and/or training provided by Walbrook. This is important so that colleagues are clear about their remit and the basis upon which decisions can be made.

9.5 You will be invited to meet with the Complaints and Appeals Panel and Walbrook will provide you with at least five days' notice of the meeting date. Where there is good reason for you not to be able to attend the proposed date (e.g. teaching session), Walbrook will be reasonable in rescheduling the date. The hearing will go ahead in your absence if you decide not to attend. You may be accompanied to the meeting for moral support by another student or a friend. This cannot be a person who has contributed to the investigation.

9.6 The Complaints and Appeals Panel will:

i Review the investigation report and agree the management of the meeting (Panel only)

ii Meet with you if you have opted to attend the meeting to ask questions arising from the report and to hear your response to the investigation findings

iii Meet with witnesses (where relevant) to ask questions arising from the report

iv Determine the outcome (by the majority of its Panel members only)

9.7 It is not the role of the Panel to undertake further investigation but to seek clarification on points arising from the report to help it determine an outcome.

9.8 The Complaints and Appeals Panel will decide that either:

i Your complaint is upheld/partially upheld, and will share the reasons why

Or

ii Your complaint is rejected and will share the reasons why

Or

iii Very exceptionally, that further information is required to inform a decision. You will be provided with details of what information is being sought and why and the timescale for providing a decision.

9.9 You will receive the decision of the Panel by email, including the reason for the decision, within 14 calendar days of the meeting.

9.10 Where a complaint is upheld, you will also be informed of the action that Walbrook will take to resolve the issue. Appropriate action, where possible, will also be taken if the issues raised in a complaint may have affected other students.

10. Review of a complaint decision

10.1 You have the right to request a review of a decision that has not upheld your complaint. Review requests must be received within 14 calendar days of the written outcome of the complaint.

10.2 A review request must meet one or both of the following criteria:

i There is new evidence that, for good reason, could not have been provided at the time at which your complaint was considered originally.

ii There is a significant procedural error in which your complaint was considered.

iii Action taken or the solution provided by Walbrook in response to the complaint findings was unreasonable.

10.3 No other reasons for a review request will be accepted, including where you are generally disappointed with the decision that has been made.

10.4 The review request will be considered by the Academic Board Review Panel. The review panel, chaired by an individual who has no direct involvement with the appeal, will undertake formal consideration of your appeal. Neither you nor your representative may be present at this hearing. The Academic Board Review Panel will either:

i Uphold the original decision if the request does not meet the criteria above

Or

ii Refer the complaint back to the point of the process at which the alleged error occurred, or where the new evidence needs to be considered. Exceptionally, (e.g. if any form of potential or actual bias has been identified) the reviewer can also

recommend that a different individual or panel is appointed to take up the matter/s that need to be addressed.

10.5 This review process will be completed within 25 calendar days, and you will be notified of the outcome, along with information about the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

10.6 This will be the end of Walbrook's direct management of your complaint.

11. Office of the Independent Adjudicator

11.1 If you are dissatisfied with decision that has been made by Walbrook on the outcome of your complaint or review request, you may contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The OIA is the body responsible for considering your complaint once the internal procedures of Walbrook have been exhausted. The OIA has specific criteria against which you can make a complaint; more information is published on the OIA website at www.oiahe.org.uk.

12. Reporting and Review

12.1 The number and nature of formal complaints will be recorded and reported annually to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. This report will consider immediate actions that were taken to improve the student experience and will also consider if any further actions are required.

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