

L A I N E
THEATRE ARTS

STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY
AND PROCEDURES
2023

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

This policy applies to students of all courses run by the College; the *Trinity National Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre*, the one-year *Foundation Diploma in Dance and Musical Theatre*, and the *BA (Hons) Top-up Degree*, validated by the University of Portsmouth.

Laine Theatre Arts (the College), prides itself on the quality of its environment, teaching, and pastoral care. If students or parents have a complaint, however, they can expect it to be treated by the College with consideration and in accordance with this Complaints Policy.

What constitutes a complaint?

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education defines a student complaint as 'An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about an institution's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the institution.' We extend the definition of 'student' to include parents and guardians.

Timeframe for Dealing with complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. The College will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within seven working days and will respond to it as detailed below. Any final appeals will be determined by the Board of Directors.

Recording Complaints

The College will keep a written record of all complaints and their determination. The College has the discretion but not the obligation to record additional information as follows;

- Date the issue was raised
- Name of student
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence relating to the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes of the hearing
- The panel's written decision

All data will be kept in accordance with our obligations under Data Protection legislation.

LTA'S COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Stage 1

Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns can be resolved by transparent and open discussion. The College is always eager to engage with the student voice, and often, solutions can be sought to issues which are being felt across an entire year group via the College's formal committee structure which allows students the opportunity to raise problems and channel constructive criticism through elected student representatives to senior management.

If an issue cannot be solved in this way, concerns are best addressed to a Vice Principal in the first instance as they are often best placed to resolve the matter quickly. Details of the appropriate Vice Principal can be found on our website.

The College will acknowledge written notification of a concern either by email or by letter within seven working days of receipt. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the appropriate member of staff will arrange to speak with the complainant or within five working days, invite them to a meeting. This meeting may prompt further investigation or wider consultation but, in any event, this stage of the complaints process should be completed within 10 working days of the meeting.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days of the meeting, or in the event that the complainant and Vice Principal fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the complainant will be advised of the ability to proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2

Formal Resolution

If a complaint has not been resolved on an informal basis, then the complainant may make a **formal** complaint to the Vice Principal concerned (Dance, MT) within 15 working days of the conclusion of the Stage 1 Informal Resolution process. This must be done in writing, stating explicitly that they wish to invoke the formal complaints procedure and detailing evidence which is required in support.

Formal complaints will be acknowledged in writing by the VP within five working days of being received. In most cases, the VP will meet or speak to the complainant to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary, however, for the VP to conduct an investigation. Following investigation, a decision will be made, and the complainant will be informed of this decision in writing, no later than 10 working days following the conclusion of the investigation.

Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept in according with data retention guidelines.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the decision, they may proceed to Stage 3 of the complaint's procedure.

Stage 3

Panel Hearing

If the complainant wishes to proceed to Stage 3, they should write to either the Principal or Executive Director within 15 working days of the conclusion of the Stage 2 Formal Resolution process. The Principal or the Executive Director will make arrangements for a Panel Hearing.

In the written request for a Panel Hearing, the complainant should state the grounds of the complaint, submit any evidence in support, and state the outcome desired. Copies of all supporting evidence must be supplied to all parties by the complainant not later than five working days before the hearing.

The Principal or Executive Director will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days of its receipt and will endeavour schedule a meeting of the Panel within 12 working days thereafter. It may not be possible to adhere to this timetable in vacation periods. If the parent decides not to attend the hearing,

either the hearing will take place in their absence, or the complaint dismissed. Under these circumstances, the panel will make their decision on the basis of the evidence available.

The Panel appointed by the Principal or Executive Director will consist of at least three senior management not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend, or relative but legal representation is not usually appropriate. If the complainant wishes to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, the College must be notified at least seven working days before the hearing. The College will not be responsible for legal fees incurred nor any disbursements.

During the hearing, all the statements made will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Chair may direct that the hearing is tape-recorded to assist accurate recollection for the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain tapes thereafter. A member of administrative support will be asked to take handwritten minutes of the proceedings in any event.

A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in, or arising from, the proceeding will be made available, directly, or indirectly, to any third party, the press, or other media.

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint, and good manners; if not, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If the meeting is terminated, the original decision will stand.

ESCALATING YOUR COMPLAINT TO THE OFFICE FOR INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATORS AND UTILISING THE OIA SCHEME

If a student feels that a complaint has not been adequately resolved through internal procedures, they have the option to escalate it to the Office for Independent Adjudicators (OIA). The OIA is an independent body that reviews complaints from students in higher education institutions fairly and impartially. If a student remains unsatisfied with the response to their complaint by LTA or feels that their concerns have not been adequately addressed, they can submit their complaint to the OIA for further review by accessing the OIA website at www.oiahe.org and submitting a complaint form via the MyOIA portal. The College is committed to ensuring that students are aware of their rights and options for seeking resolution, and encourages all students to utilise the OIA Scheme where they feel it necessary.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All communications and records in respect of complaints will be kept confidential by the College. The College expects this duty of confidentiality to be mirrored by the complainant.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The Board of Directors will generally monitor the volume and type of complaints received by the College and the implementation of the procedures set out in this policy. It will procure that there is an annual review of this policy to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.

UNREASONABLE, VEXATIOUS AND PERSISTENT COMPLAINTS

Whilst it is hoped that this procedure will address any perceived failing of the College, it is acknowledged that there may be rare occasions where a complainant continues to be dissatisfied with the College and the outcomes of the complaint's procedure.

Where a complainant attempts to re-open an issue which has already been dealt with under the complaints procedure, the Chair of Directors will make contact to inform that the matter has already been dealt with and that either the relevant stage of the policy has been exhausted or that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and the matter is considered closed. Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, this may be considered vexatious, and the College will be under no obligation to respond to that correspondence.

If the complainant subsequently and repeatedly contacts the College about the same issue, the College can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which the College will not respond is if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate the complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints' investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented upon
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the College's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on college time by frequent, lengthy, and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums
- breaches confidentiality

Once the College has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing. If the complainant acts in a manner that could be deemed as harassment the College reserves its rights to seek legal redress and/or refer the matter to the police as may be appropriate.

The College will keep records of formal complaints and hearings for a period of at least six years after a student has left the college.

Policy reviewed by Academic Board. Date for review: September 2027