

N8. CONCERNS ABOUT ACADEMIC STANDARDS OR QUALITY

This section of the CAPR has been agreed by the University of Plymouth (as the awarding body) as meeting its requirements for the processing of concerns raised about academic standards or quality on Plymouth University programmes delivered by GSM London.

This section was informed by the QAA guidance on [Raising concerns about standards and quality in higher education](#)

Related guidance and codes of practice can also be found at the [QAA Code of Practice, Admissions in Higher Education. Chapter B9 Academic Appeals and Student Complaints](#)

Purpose and scope

- 8.1 This section of the Consolidated Academic Policies and Regulations (CAPR) explains how any person outside the College community can raise concerns about the academic standards or quality of its activities, how these concerns will be dealt with, and what action the person can expect the College to take in response.
- 8.2 This policy applies to College visitors or members of the public.
- 8.3 This policy does not apply to current students or past students three (3) months after graduating (as defined by the date on the letter confirming an award) or the date the students registration is terminated leaving the College; other bodies or persons working with or for the College (including partners or external examiners). Where appropriate, they must use the policies or regulations about student concerns and complaints; partnerships; or external examining, as the case may be.
- 8.4 This policy does not apply to concerns raised about:
- (a) GSM London Students' Union;
 - (b) the College's relationship with a particular student or group of students;
 - (c) matters that are or have been subject of a public interest disclosure, criminal investigation or legal proceedings; or
 - (d) matters that have been or should more appropriately be raised under another College regulation or policy.

NOTE: Any student, current or within three (3) months of their graduation, who wishes to raise a concern or complaint about the provision or delivery of a programme must use the Student Concerns and Complaints Policy.

Definitions

- 8.5 'Academic standards' means the level of achievement needed by a student in their programme to be eligible for a College award, and the processes the College puts in place to ensure a student meets this level.

- 8.6 'Academic quality' means how and how well the College supports students to enable them to achieve their award. This includes learning, teaching and assessment, and all the resources and processes the College puts in place to help students progress and fulfil their potential.

Introduction

Overview

- 8.7 The College aims to promote a culture of openness and a shared sense of integrity by inviting all members of its community (including employees and students) to act responsibly to uphold the College's reputation and maintain public confidence in Higher Education, the College and its awards.
- 8.8 However, the College recognises that any member of its external community (for example, visitor, relatives, employers, community partners) may be the first to recognise something wrong within the College. These may be legitimate concerns about issues affecting its academic standards or quality.
- 8.9 Therefore, the College considers it important to maintaining public confidence in its activities that members of its internal and external communities (academic or otherwise) can express any concerns about the academic standards and quality.
- 8.10 In order to fulfil QAA responsibilities the College will inform Plymouth University, as partner and/or awarding institution, of any concerns raised about Academic Standards or Quality under this policy and will seek advice and guidance from Plymouth University in addressing the concerns raised.

Principles

- 8.11 The College encourages all external members of its community to raise genuine concerns about its activities as soon as they reasonably can. This policy provides a quick way of doing so internally with the College and, if necessary, externally, without fear of harm to themselves or anyone connected to the College.
- 8.12 The policy seeks to balance the need to provide clear mechanisms for raising genuine concerns about the College activities and the need to protect colleagues, staff members, members of the Board of Directors, and the College against uninformed or vexatious allegations.
- 8.13 Therefore, in dealing with any concern, College staff are expected to:
- (a) treat anyone raising a concern with trust and respect;
 - (b) treat the matter seriously, in good faith and with due confidentiality;
 - (c) recognise that other members of the College may need to be consulted to resolve the matter;

- (d) ensure that all stakeholders are fully informed on the consequences of any remedy; and
- (e) seek as swift and as full a remedy as is reasonably practicable.

8.14 However, to protect the College and its members the College will not normally consider concerns that:

- (a) are made anonymously or on behalf of someone else (unless the complainant has formally nominated a third party to do so. For example, an individual with a disability whose carer is handling the case for them;
- (b) have already been investigated and disposed of;
- (c) are made without disclosing adequate grounds; or
- (d) are malicious, vexatious or frivolous.

Procedures

Overview

8.15 The process for raising a concern contains three (3) stages:

- (a) Stage 1 – Initial investigation.
- (b) Stage 2 – Internal review.
- (c) Stage 3 – External review.

Stage 1 – Initial investigation

8.16 Any concern about the College's academic standards and quality (including concerns about the accuracy and completeness of information published by the College), should be raised in writing to the relevant Head of Department.

8.17 If the person raising the concern does not know the name of the relevant Head of Department, or has general concerns, they should address the concern to the Academic Registrar, who will decide who the relevant Head of Department is.

8.18 In addition, if the person raising the concern is connected to the College or a student through assessment:

- (a) they may raise concerns about academic standards and quality with the relevant Board of Examiners or in their assessment report; or
- (b) if they wish, they may raise any matter of serious concern in confidence in a written report to the Provost.

8.19 A Head of Department may decline to become involved if they have reasonable grounds, including:

- (a) previous involvement or interest in the matter;
- (b) incapacity or unavailability; or
- (c) being satisfied, after consulting the Academic Registrar, that another Head of Department would be more suitable to consider the matter.

8.20 The Head of Department will make all necessary investigations. They have the right to call for papers, take evidence, examine witnesses and make such other enquiries as they see fit and as are necessary to establish what action is required on the matter.

8.21 The Head of Department will consult with the Head of UK Partnerships and/or Relationship Development Manager, Plymouth University to seek advice and guidance in determining a resolution

8.22 The Head of Department must normally seek to complete the investigations and give conclusions and recommendations in writing to the person raising the concern and the College within ten (10) working days of receiving the matter. Any delay in this timescale will be communicated to all parties before the deadline, with reasons for the delay.

8.23 The Head of Department must ensure that the Office of Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulation (OSCAR) is aware of the full content of the concern and approves any response.

Stage 2 – Internal review

8.24 If the person raising the concern is dissatisfied by the Head of Department's response, they may ask for a Senior Officer of the College to review it.

8.25 They must submit a request for a review in writing, addressed to the Chair of the Academic Board within ten (10) days of the response being issued. The Chair will appoint an appropriate investigating officer. The request should include a specific statement about why they are not satisfied with the response, and what they consider an appropriate response to be.

8.26 The investigating officer will determine all further investigations. They have the right to call for papers, take evidence, examine witnesses and make such other enquiries as they see fit and as are necessary to establish what action is required on the matter.

8.27 The investigating officer will consider all evidence that all parties have put forward at any stage during the investigation of the matter, along with any witness statements.

8.28 The investigating officer must normally seek to complete the investigations and give conclusions and recommendations in writing to the person raising the concern and the College within twenty (20) working days of receiving the request. Any delay in this timescale will be communicated to all parties before the deadline, with reasons for the delay.

8.29 The investigating officer must:

- (a) ensure that OSCAR is aware of the full content of the concern and investigation;

- (b) consult with the Head of UK Partnerships, or Relationship Development Manager, Plymouth University, to seek advice and guidance in accordance with QAA responsibilities and
- (c) ensure that the Chair of the Academic Board, on behalf of the Academic Board, approves any response.

- 8.30 The Academic Board's response is final and will include a letter saying that internal procedures have been completed, and outline any further opportunities review that the person may take.
- 8.31 Upon completion the College will inform the Head of UK Partnerships and/or Relationship Development Manager, Plymouth University, as partner and/or the awarding institution, of the outcome of the internal procedure

Stage 3 – Review

- 8.32 If the College has gone through all its internal procedures and you are still not satisfied, you can:

- (a) contact the Complaints and Appeals Office, Plymouth University as the awarding institution. Contact details are (email) complaints@plymouth.ac.uk
- (b) contact the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) for advice about its Concerns Scheme for further review. Details can be found at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/concerns>

Advice and support

- 8.33 Advice for visitors or members of the public on raising a concern about College activities, and associated lower-level College rules, is available from any Senior Officer of the College, or OSCAR (oscar@gsmlondon.ac.uk). More complex questions may be referred to appropriate individuals.
- 8.34 Advice for staff on how visitors or members of the public may raise a concern about College activities is available from any Senior Officer of the College.
- 8.35 Any staff development needs identified, they may be discussed with members of the Staff and Educational Development or Human Resources team.

Fees

- 8.36 No additional fees or charges are associated with this policy.
- 8.37 The College is not liable for financial or other consequences arising from action under this policy.

Legal and regulatory context

- 8.38 This policy has been informed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) guidance “Raising concerns about standards and quality in higher education” (Feb 2015). This guidance outlines the regulatory approach to investigating serious systemic or procedural concerns about standards and quality raised by students, staff and other parties.
- 8.39 Visitors or members of the public are not College employees so their disclosures are not regarded as qualifying disclosures under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 or the Employment Rights Act 1996. Therefore, individuals raising concerns are not given legal protection by the acts. However, the College will pay regard to the principles in the acts and will implement their spirit as far as is practicable.
- 8.40 The College may not be bound by the principles in paragraphs 8.36 and 8.37 and this policy alone may not provide the procedure to meet all of these principles, some of which may be met by other College policies and procedures.. It uses the principles as guidance only, to help it deal soundly with these matters.

Enforcement, monitoring and review

- 8.41 If any person or body in the College refuses to comply with a request or decision made to enforce this policy, their refusal must be reported to the Academic Registrar, who will take such action to enforce this policy as they think necessary.
- 8.42 Each year, the College must receive a report that enables it to monitor, identify and act on any shortfalls in how this policy is interpreted and applied.
- 8.43 The annual report must include statistical data, where available, on numbers of concerns submitted; the outcomes, Departments and programmes to which they refer; the length of the process; and the equality characteristics (including sex, disability and ethnicity) of those submitting concerns.
- 8.44 Every three (3) years, the Academic Board and Board of Directors – as the primary bodies responsible for academic standards – must review this policy to ensure that:
- (a) it remains up to date and continues to meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code, applicable legislation or guidance;
 - (b) areas for improvement in, or any concerns raised about, the policy by visitors, students, external examiners, or professional bodies have been addressed; and
 - (c) opportunities to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy have been taken.

Schedule (not part of the policy or regulations)

Responsible Officer: Provost

Approved by: Board of Directors and Academic Board

Version: 1.0

Date: 21 June 2017

Monitoring and Review Body: Academic Board and Board of Directors

Effective From: July 2017

Next Scheduled Review: Oct 2018