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**Document title:** Student Complaint Investigation Protocol – Templates and forms for handling students complaints

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**Office/department responsible:** Registry Department

**Approved by:** Dr. Mahmoud Allam – President of The Knowledge Hub Universities

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## Student Complaints Procedure

### The process for Investigating Officers on investigating Stage 1 complaints

#### 1. Background

##### 1.1 Receipt of Complaint

When a Stage 1 complaint form is received by the Registry it is scanned and logged, along with any other attachments. The Registry then sends the relevant Head of School a copy of the documentation and offers a five working days early resolution opportunity. If it is not possible to resolve the issue to the student's satisfaction at this point, the Registry appoints an Investigating Officer. If the complaint involves more than one School or Service it will be sent to both and the Registry will give responsibility to one for the response. The deadline for initial acknowledgement to the student and then completion and outcome of the investigation responding to the student is provided in an accompanying email. As stated in the procedure, the response to the student should be provided within 30 working days. If the complexity of the investigation or availability of individuals involved means it will take longer, the student must be contacted in writing to explain any delays. The Registry should be consulted and agree to any time extension needed.

##### 1.2 Deciding upon an Investigating Officer

The Registry will, on receipt of the complaint form, appoint an Investigating Officer, at the same time advising the Head of the relevant School who has been appointed. The Investigating Officer should be a member of University staff (Programme Leader or higher) She or he must not have had any material prior involvement in the events that precipitated the complaint, or day to day responsibility for any of the individuals who are the subject of the complaint.

The appointment needs to be made quickly so that the complaint can be handled within the agreed deadlines. If the Investigating Officer has not completed a stage 1 complaint previously they must contact the Registry so that they can be briefed on the procedure. Those who have previously investigated complaints are also welcome to contact the Registry for further briefing. The Investigating Officer must use the complaint investigation forms:

- Report Template
- Checklist of Issues
- Interview Forms
- Letter templates

Faculties / Services should have a pool of investigating officers who are trained by the Registry to undertake this work and who can therefore build up some expertise.

## 2. Undertaking the Investigation

### Initial Investigating Officer Duties

The Investigating Officer should list the issues raised by the complainant in the **Checklist of Issues**, noting the action that needs to be taken to investigate each issue, e.g. hold meeting with witnesses to the incident, probe the issue further with the complainant to clarify, discuss with student's tutor, review any relevant documentation. The Checklist of issues should be agreed by the complainant. It is essential that fresh conversations are initiated with staff and there is no reliance on lengthy email trails – which include irrelevant material - as evidence. Key emails or relevant extracts from key emails may be used as appendices. Only material which is directly relevant to arriving at a judgement on the complaint should be included. This checklist will ensure that all points raised by the student are covered during the investigation and all the relevant meetings/discussions are undertaken. The Registry is available to provide advice for Investigating Officers who may wish to discuss the way in which they should carry out the investigation.

Where a complaint contains allegations against members of staff, or is for another reason particularly complex or sensitive, then the principles laid out in the complaints procedure should, be used to guide investigation of that complaint. This will ensure that the outcome of the complaint is fair, support the member of staff charged with investigating the complaint, and ensure that the university's judgement cannot be later challenged on grounds of fairness.

The principles of natural justice inform our consideration of any complaint and ensure that the process is fair and transparent. In particular:

- All parties to a complaint should be able to give their own evidence
- All parties to a complaint should be able to see all of the evidence given by others ('full disclosure') and this should be kept on record for any future requests for it from internal or possibly external bodies.
- All investigations should be conducted in a timely manner, both for the benefit of the student, and for the staff involved. Where delay is unavoidable, all parties should be told of the reasons why, and a revised date for completion.
- All information gathered in the investigation of the complaint should be treated as confidential and only disclosed where necessary to progress the investigation or for the purpose of disclosure above.

### Initiating the investigation

The Investigating Officer should be clear as to the precise issue or issues to be investigated, and the Investigating Officer should notify any staff who are the subject of the complaint of the complaint, and of the impending investigation. The Investigating Officer should review any initial documentation received, and then arrange meetings with all relevant parties. It is best practice to begin by interviewing the complainant, and if the complaint is against a member of staff, it is best practice to interview her/him last. The Investigating Officer must signpost members of staff to sources of support and students to the Students' Union.

If one party to the complaint does not wish to meet, then the Investigating Officer should acknowledge this in writing, and invite her/him to provide any additional written documentation. If the subject of the complaint refuses to participate, then the Investigating Officer should inform

her/him that unless evidence is provided in writing, the investigation will proceed on the basis of the available information.

Any witness statements made in the course of the investigation must be signed and dated. Coventry University Branch at The Knowledge Hub (CU Branch at TKH) does not accept anonymous complaints and would not take anonymous witness statements.

### **Arranging interviews**

Anyone who is asked to attend an interview must be told in advance of the reason for the interview and given a copy of the Student Complaints procedure. Both students and staff should be given reasonable notice of the interview date and time and have the right to request to be accompanied by a member of the CU Branch at TKH community. Where people are interviewed as witnesses to an incident, they should be interviewed one at a time. Interviews should be held in a suitable private room. The Investigating Officer should ask another member of staff to attend to take notes of the meeting.

### **Good practice for interviews:**

- Explain the context and purpose of the meeting, and the importance of confidentiality. Make sure that those attending are aware that the record of the meeting will be made available to the key parties in the complaint.
- Where it is judged that there is a possibility that the outcome of the complaint may lead into other CU Branch at TKH or TKH procedures (for example, a student or staff disciplinary), those attending should be informed of the possibility that they might be required to give evidence at any hearing.
- Use open questions where possible, and do not ask leading questions.
- Ask for specific examples when unspecific comments or allegations are made.
- Finish by recapping the main points covered, explaining what the next steps in the process will be, and answering any questions or concerns about process.
- Witnesses may need to be signposted to support, but this should also be done for complainants, and the subjects of any complaint.
- If the complaint is about a member of staff, advise the student that they will not be informed of the action taken against that member of staff

Careful notes should be kept of all these meetings, please use the complainant, student and staff interview forms. This is not a verbatim record, but should detail the key points of the discussion, and cross-refer to any relevant documents. The form should clearly record who was present. Where statements have been made that are hearsay (second-hand), or not supported with other evidence, the interview record should make that clear. A copy of the notes should be sent within three working days to the interviewee for comment and return within a further five working days. If the interviewee does not return it with comment within this time, assent is assumed.

Further allegations, or counter allegations may be made. Where these relate directly to the investigation which the Investigating Officer has been charged to carry out, then she/he must make a decision about whether to include these in the current investigation. Where they do not, the

person making those allegations should be referred to the appropriate process so that she/he can initiate a new case.

As the investigation continues the 'proposed response' column of the Checklist of Issues should be completed. It is essential that this list addresses all issues raised in the original complaint. If there is a reason why an issue cannot be addressed, the list should explicitly reference this, and give the reason. This means that the CU Branch at TKH can be confident that all issues have been addressed and helps to prevent situations where students introduce "new" issues at later stages of the process.

### **3. Conclusion of the complaint**

#### **Reaching a conclusion**

The Investigating Officer will need to make a recommendation that the complaint be upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld, and the reasons why that recommendation was reached. They should also allocate ownership of that recommendation to a faculty or service. In arriving at that recommendation, the standard required is a reasonable belief, on the balance of probability as supported by the evidence, that the complaint is upheld, not upheld or partially upheld. This judgement should take into account:

- That direct evidence is normally more compelling than indirect evidence;
- That evidence which is vague, is unsubstantiated opinion or hearsay, which omits significant detail, or which contains inherent contradictions or which is contradicted by strong evidence (particularly strong contemporaneous evidence) is questionable;
- That there is a need to give consideration to bias, motivation or influence in any evidence.

#### **Recommendation of financial award in respect of the complaint**

If compensation is deemed to be an appropriate outcome, the Investigating Officer should seek advice from the TKH President for context of Egyptian HE practice.

#### **Preparing the Report**

Once the Investigating Officer has completed the investigation, she/he should prepare a report, using the enclosed template, for the Registry and all other involved parties, where appropriate. This report will include:

- A summary of the complaint;
- A summary of the process undertaken: who was interviewed, what documentation was received;
- The outcome of the investigation: the Investigating Officer's recommendation;
- Where the complaint is partially or fully upheld, a recommended remedy;
- Any other recommendations for further action or note;
- Some internal only recommendations

- If more than one School/Service are involved in the complaint the Investigating Officer will have identified which School or Service is to lead on the response (advice should be sought from the Registry and TKH President on this where necessary)

The Registry will review the Investigating Officer's report and evidence consult with other relevant parties and if that upholds the complaint, make a decision as to the remedy, or request further investigatory work before that decision can be made. Schools and /or Services who are not identified as the lead, but are owners of some aspects of the complaint, will take a decision on the remedy for any upheld/partly upheld elements and produce a paragraph for the final letter.

The Registry should then produce a letter which should then be sent to the complainant setting out the response to the complaint and sent by the agreed deadline. The response must clearly explain the reasons why the complaint is upheld or rejected.

If there are any recommendations contained in the report which the relevant Head of School should action, they should report progress on these to the Registry no later than 30 working days than the date of the letter sent to the complainant.

If there are actions which cannot be implemented by the Head of School these should be forward to the TKH President upon receipt of the Investigator's Report

In the first instance, the relevant School or Service should send the Registry:

- a copy of the outcome letter

If a student takes his or her case to Complaint Review, the Registry will request the following additional documents to be sent within 5 working days:

- the Investigating Officer's report
- The Checklist of Issues to be investigated
- copies of minutes/ notes of any meetings which took place
- timeline of the issues being complained about.
- Detailed contents list of all enclosures

### **Retention and disposal of complaint documentation**

All documents in relation to the complaint, whether held in School or Service, should be retained from the last date of any action on the complaint plus six years. They should then be securely disposed of.

## **Forms and standard letter templates for use**

TKHC1 – standard letter/ email template: initial acknowledgement from Investigating Officer

TKHC2– checklist of issues to be investigated

TKHC3– standard letter: invitation to complainant to meet with Investigating Officer

TKHC4– standard letter: issue of record of meeting to complainant

TKHC5– template for record of meeting with complainant

TKHC6– template for record of any meetings with other students

TKHC7- template for record of any meeting with staff

TKHC8– Investigating Officer’s report

TKHC9– standard letter: outcome to complainant from Head of School

Exemplar timeline template

\* TKHC1 and TKHC3 may be combined.



**TKHC1**

Initial acknowledgement from Investigating Officer

Date

Dear XXXXXX

I am writing to acknowledge your complaint, received on xxxxxx

You will receive a written response to your complaint by xxxxxxx.

We may be in touch with you during the course of our investigations to gather further information.

Yours sincerely

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**TKHC22**

**Checklist of Issues to be Investigated**

**Complaint reference number (this will be allocated by the Registry)**

**Name of Student**

**Date Compiled**

Issue Number	Issue raised by Complainant	Action needed to investigate the issue	Proposed outcome	Evidence to support outcome
1.				
2.				
3.				

I can confirm that the issues listed above reflect the concerns I would like to complain about:

Student signature (to be obtained at face to face meeting or via email, which should be appended to this form):

Date:

Investigating Officer's signature

Date:



**TKHC3**

Complaint Reference (allocated by the Registry)

Meeting with Student – Stage 1

**PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL**

DATE

Dear **xxxxx**

**Re: Stage 1 Complaint**

I am writing to you with regard to your complaint concerning **[brief description of complaint]**.  
I am the Investigating Officer appointed to handle your case and having reviewed your initial submission I would like to meet with you to discuss the matter further.

Please telephone me on **xxxx** or email **xxx@tkh.edu.eg** to arrange a date for the meeting. You can also contact me if you have any other queries regarding this complaint.

You have the right to be supported by a member of the CU Branch at TKH community (which is a person who is a currently enrolled student of CU Branch at TKH, or a member of staff of the CU Branch at TKH, or a member of staff or elected officer of the TKH Students' Union)

At least twenty four hours before the meeting you should advise me of the name and status of the person accompanying you.

If there are any circumstances (for example, a disability) that we need to be aware of in our handling of your case, please let me know.

I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

**NAME**

Investigating Officer

**TKHC4**

Letter following meeting

**PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL**

Name

Address

Date:

Dear xx

**Stage 1 Complaint**

Please find attached the record of the meeting held on <date> in connection with the complaint by you/name. I would be grateful if you could read the record and either confirm that it is an accurate record or let me know of anything that you believe to be incorrect.

If I do not receive a response by <date> then I will assume that you are happy with the content of the record.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Name

Position (Investigating Officer for this complaint)

**TKHC5**

**Complaint reference number (allocated by the Registry)**

**Name of Student**

**Date**

**Student Complainant Interview Form**

Please use this form for recording interviews with the complainant

Please note that students must be made aware that the contents of this pro-forma will contribute to the investigative report which may be used in a future meeting. Please show students this form before the interview commences so that they are aware that a note of the interview will be produced and how it may be used. Inform the students that they will be given the opportunity to read and sign the note before it is finalised.

**Please ask at this stage if the student would be interested in considering mediation as a way of resolving their complaint.**

Student Name	
Registration Number	
Purpose of interview	
Name of interviewer	
Date of interview	
Summary of Meeting ( <i>description of what was said</i> )	
Student signature: Or email consent (append email)	Interviewer signature:
Date:	Date:

**TKHC6**

**Complaint reference number (allocated by the Registry)**

**Name of Student**

**Date**

**Student / Witness Interview Form**

Please use this form for recording interviews with students in relation to student complaints.

Please note that students must be made aware that the contents of this pro-forma will contribute to the investigative report which may be used in a future meeting. Please show the student this form before the interview commences so that they are aware that a note of the interview will be produced and how it may be used. Inform the student that she/he will be given the opportunity to read and sign the note before it is finalised.

Student Name	
Registration Number	
Purpose of interview	
Name of interviewer	
Date of interview	
Summary of Meeting ( <i>description of what was said</i> )	
Student signature:	Interviewer signature
Date:	Date:

**TKHC 7**

**Complaint reference number (allocated by the Registry)**

**Name of Student**

**Date**

**Staff Interview Form**

Please use this form for recording interviews with staff in relation to student complaints.

Please note that a member of staff must be made aware that the contents of this pro-forma will contribute to the investigative report which may be used in a future meeting. Please show the member of staff this form before the interview commences so that he/she is aware that a note of the interview will be produced and how it may be used. Inform the member of staff that she/he will be given the opportunity to read and sign the note before it is finalised.

Staff Name	
Purpose of interview	
Name of interviewer	
Date of interview	
Summary of Meeting ( <i>description of what was said</i> )	
Staff signature:	Interviewer Signature:
Date:	Date:

## TKHC8

### Complaint reference number (allocated by the Registry)

### Name of Student

### Date

### Investigating Officer's Report

#### 1. Time Line

The purpose of the timeline is to enable staff who have had no previous involvement in the case to immediately become familiar with the key points of the complaint and investigation. It is vital that key dates for both the events contributing to the complaint and actions taken as a result of it are recorded.

An exemplar timeline is below. This is to be completed by the Investigating Officer.

<b>Dates</b>	
12/1/20	Student attended lecture but this was cancelled
13/1/20	Student emailed lecturer to ask why class had been cancelled with no notice given. Student had incurred travel and child care costs for, "no reason."
17/1/20	Student emailed again as no response had been received
20/1/20	Student emailed faculty general account to complain about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) cancelled lecture</li> <li>b) lack of response from lecturer</li> <li>c) reimbursement of costs incurred.</li> </ul>
19/1/20	Student attends lecture asks why lecture was cancelled. Does not feel she receives a satisfactory explanation.
22/1/20	Student received email response from School but was unhappy with tone and content of email
27/1/20	Student submits formal complaint

**2. Summary of Complaint** (*brief summary of the complaint*)

**3. Investigation** (*list all those interviewed, along with dates of meetings, and any documentation (other than the original complaint documentation) considered*)

**3.1 Meetings held**

Date:

Names of those present

**3.2 Documentation considered (e.g. e-mails, regulations, etc)**

**4. Summary of Issues Investigated and Findings** (*You may wish to use sub-headings appropriate to the complaint/investigation in this section*)

**5. Conclusion** (*Please summarise the conclusion of your investigation and any recommendations you wish to put forward.*)

TKHC9

**Outcome letter**

**PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL**

DATE

Dear **xxxxx**

**Re: Stage 1 Complaint**

I am writing to you with regard to your complaint concerning **[brief description of complaint]**.  
The investigation into your complaint has now been completed and on the basis of the investigation conducted I have decided to uphold/partially uphold/not uphold your complaint.

The reasons for this are:

Issue raised	Outcome	Evidence to support outcome

If you remain dissatisfied with the response to your complaint you may request a review of your complaint. This must be done within 10 working days of receiving the response to your complaint. Your complaint review form should be lodged with the Registry. The form can be found here: [www.tkh.edu.eg/policies](http://www.tkh.edu.eg/policies)

Yours sincerely

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**Review Date:** September 2020



**\*\*\*Disclaimer:** The Knowledge Hub Universities reviews the policies on regular basis if needed for work flow and business purposes.

Version Log	Date	Signature of the President of TKH
Version 1 (V.1)		