

LAINÉ

THEATRE ARTS

Policies

Student Complaints Policy and Procedures

STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The following policy applies to BA (Hons) Musical Theatre (3-year course), Level 6 Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre, BA (Hons) Musical Theatre (one-year top-up), Cert HE (Musical Theatre) and the 1-year Foundation Course in Musical Theatre.

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.

CONSUMER PROTECTION AND FAIRNESS

This policy is designed to ensure that complaints are handled in a manner that is fair, transparent, and consistent with consumer protection law and regulatory expectations.

The College will ensure that:

- Students are treated fairly and without disadvantage
- Information provided to students is clear and accurate
- Decisions are proportionate, evidence-based, and clearly explained
- Appropriate remedies are considered where complaints are upheld

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. Where complaints are raised by parents or guardians, the College will require the explicit consent of the student before sharing personal information, unless exceptional circumstances apply

SCOPE AND RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROCEDURES

This procedure applies to complaints concerning the provision of educational and related services by the College. It does not apply to:

- Academic appeals (which are governed by the Academic Appeals Policy)
- Disciplinary matters (student or staff)
- Safeguarding, harassment, or sexual misconduct allegations, which will be managed in accordance with the College's Safeguarding and Harassment Procedures (with appropriate referral from this procedure where required)

Where a complaint includes elements that fall under multiple procedures, the College will determine the most appropriate process and inform the complainant accordingly.

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. The Board of Directors will not normally act as a hearing body for individual complaints. Its role is to provide oversight and assurance that the complaints process is effective, fair, and compliant with regulatory expectations.

RECORDING COMPLAINTS

The College will maintain a centralised and complete written record of all formal complaints and their outcomes. As a minimum, the following information will be recorded:

- Date the issue was raised
- Name of the complainant
- Nature of the complaint
- Actions taken and investigation steps
- Evidence considered (including witness statements where applicable)
- Staff involved at each stage
- Outcome and rationale
- Any remedy applied

This information will be retained and used for monitoring, reporting, and quality enhancement purposes.

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.

Where a complaint raises potential safeguarding concerns, harassment, or sexual misconduct, the matter will be immediately referred to the appropriate safeguarding procedures, and may be managed outside or alongside this process to ensure student safety and regulatory compliance.

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 (either Dance or Musical Theatre) 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 Vice Principal within five working days of being received. In most cases, the Vice Principal 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 Vice Principal 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.

Outcomes and Remedies

Following investigation or panel consideration, complaints may be:

- Upheld
- Partially upheld
- Not upheld

Where a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, the College will consider appropriate remedies, which may include:

- Apology and explanation
- Corrective action (e.g. reassessment, additional teaching)
- Financial remedy where appropriate
- Changes to policy or practice

All outcomes will be communicated in writing, with clear reasons for the decision.

Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept in accordance 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.

Where a complaint raises potential safeguarding concerns, harassment, or sexual misconduct, the matter will be immediately referred to the appropriate safeguarding procedures and may be managed outside or alongside this process to ensure student safety and regulatory compliance.

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 outcome of the formal complaint.

Formal Resolution Process

The Principal or the Executive Director will make arrangements for a Panel Hearing.

The Panel will consist of at least three members, including:

- At least one senior member of staff not previously involved in the matter
- At least one independent member (external to the operational management of the College)

The Chair of the Panel will be independent of the earlier stages of the process.

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 and Artistic Director or Executive Director will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days of its receipt and will endeavour to 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 and Artistic Director or Executive Director will meet with the complainant. 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.

The Panel will consider all evidence presented and will reach its decision on the balance of probabilities.

A written outcome will be provided, including:

- Findings of fact
- Reasons for the decision
- Any actions or remedies

COMPLETION OF PROCEDURES (COP) AND OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR (OIA)

If a student has completed all internal procedures and remains dissatisfied with the final decision, a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter will be issued where appropriate. This letter confirms that the College's internal processes have been concluded and sets out the issues considered and the final decision reached. Where eligible, receipt of a COP letter enables the student to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), an independent body which reviews complaints from students in higher education in England and Wales.

Any referral to the OIA must be made within 12 months of the date of the COP letter. Further information about the OIA, including the complaint scheme and how to submit a complaint, is available at www.oiahe.org.uk.

The OIA will normally only review cases after all internal procedures have been completed. It does not re-hear cases or make academic judgements but will consider whether the provider followed its procedures fairly and reasonably and whether any remedy is appropriate.

CONFIDENTIALITY

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

However, confidentiality may be limited where:

- Disclosure is required by law
- There are safeguarding concerns
- Information is required for the fair investigation of the complaint

ACCESSIBILITY AND SUPPORT

The College will make reasonable adjustments to ensure that all students can access the complaints process.

Students may be supported by:

- A friend, representative, or adviser
- Adjustments for disability or language needs

The College will ensure that no student is disadvantaged in accessing this procedure.

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. The College will undertake annual thematic analysis of complaints to identify trends, risks, and areas for improvement.

A summary report will be considered by the Academic Board and Board of Directors to inform quality enhancement and institutional improvement.

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 the Board 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:

1. refuses to articulate the complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
2. refuses to co-operate with the complaints' investigation process.
3. refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure.
4. insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice.
5. introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented upon.
6. raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
7. makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seek to have them replaced.
8. changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.

9. repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
10. 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.
11. seeks an unrealistic outcome.
12. 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.
13. uses threats to intimidate.
14. uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language or violence.
15. knowingly provides falsified information.
16. publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.
17. 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 ensure that complaints are not deemed vexatious solely on the basis that a complainant is persistent, where the issues raised are substantive and remain unresolved.

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.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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