



Complaints Policy

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Introduction

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth) is a membership organisation that promotes and supports the ophthalmic profession in the UK and overseas. We provide professional development guidance, training and educational activities for all our members. As the voice of our members, we influence national eye health policy for the benefit of patients and the profession of ophthalmology.

This complaints policy does not cover complaints about our members, except if they are volunteers at the College or members of our staff.

We are not a regulatory body and complaints about individual doctors should be dealt with by the local procedures of the hospital, practice or clinic and, if necessary, referred to the General Medical Council. Nor can we handle complaints about the delivery of ophthalmic services by the NHS or other healthcare providers. Please contact the ophthalmic service provider for their guidance on making a complaint.

The College takes complaints about conduct and standards of service seriously and we define a complaint as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction or concern about a product, service, policy, or behaviour that a person believes is inadequate, unacceptable, or has not met their expectations.”

The College is committed to resolving complaints promptly, fairly, and effectively. All complaints will be handled sympathetically. Confidentiality is a fundamental component of our complaints policy, ensuring that all information related to a complaint is handled with the utmost discretion and care.

This Complaints Policy does not apply to:

- RCOphth examination results. If you would like to appeal these, please visit our website for full details of the [examinations appeals procedure](#)
- Employee (staff) incidents, issues and concerns covered in our Employee Handbook.
- Whistleblowing. This is considered under the College whistleblowing policy which is available on our website.

The College does not address complaints that are considered inappropriate or not submitted in good faith.

Making a complaint

If you have an incident, issue or concern that you would like to raise with the College, you must put your complaint in writing to the Chief Executive or the Honorary Secretary.

Ali.rivett@rcophth.ac.uk or hon.sec@rcophth.ac.uk

Your complaint must include:

- your name
- full contact details
- the nature of the complaint
- who has been involved so far
- what has/has not been done to date
- why you are not satisfied with the outcome
- how you would like to see the matter resolved
- any supporting evidence of the incident, issue or concern.

Please note that without full details of the complaint the College will be unable to investigate the concern thoroughly and this may result in the complaint being closed due to lack of information.

Complaints should ideally be made within one month of the problem or concern. This will help us to effectively establish what happened and gather any information or evidence needed to carry out a full investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint by return (or) within 48 hours and we will aim to resolve the matter for you as soon as possible and in any event within 20 working days of receiving it. If we cannot respond fully in this timeframe, we will let you know.

Once a complaint has been received, an internal investigation will take place. Your complaint will be passed to an appropriate person who was not involved in the events which led to the complaint and who is in a position and has the relevant experience to investigate

the complaint. If the complaint concerns an employee of the College, this will normally be organised by the Chief Executive. If the complaint concerns a volunteer, the investigation will be organised by the Honorary Secretary.

We may need to ask you for additional information in order to investigate the complaint thoroughly. We will expect to receive this within a 10-working day deadline.

To make sure we comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty, we consider adjustments for people with protected characteristics such as hearing or sight impairments, language difficulties or other specific needs. If you require reasonable adjustments to this process, you can contact us by telephone on 0300 030 2020 or write to us at:

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists
18 Stephenson Way
London
NW1 2HD.

Examples of reasonable adjustments to our complaints process would be:

- flexible meeting arrangements
- alternative formats
- extended timeframes
- allowing complainants to be accompanied by a support person who can assist them throughout the process.

The College will not retaliate or discriminate against the complainant, and their identity will be kept confidential unless required by law or the appropriate consent has been given by the complainant.

The Chief Executive/Honorary Secretary will write to the complainant after the full investigation is complete setting out the findings, whether the complaint is upheld or not, and what will be done (if anything) as a result.

Appeal by an Appeal Panel

If you are not satisfied with how your complaint has been handled, or if you are the subject of a complaint and would like to appeal, an appeal request should be made in writing to the Chief Executive. Complaints involving the Chief Executive should be sent to our Honorary Secretary.

Your appeal request must be made within 20 working days of the College's response to the complaint. It must set out why you are dissatisfied with the response, and your grounds for appealing.

Please note that without precise details of your grounds of appeal, with any supporting evidence, the College will be unable to review the response to the complaint thoroughly and the appeal request may be declined due to lack of information.

The Honorary Secretary or the Vice-President will carry out an investigation of the appeal request. If the Honorary Secretary considered the initial complaint, the Vice-President will investigate the appeal request.

If it is considered there are no arguable grounds for an appeal, the appellant will be informed, normally within 20 working days of receipt of the appeal request. The investigator's decision is final.

If it is considered that there are arguable grounds for an appeal, an Appeal Panel will be convened, if practicable within 40 working days of the appeal request being received.

The Appeal Panel will comprise:

- the Honorary Secretary or Vice-President, who will act as Chair of the Appeal Panel
- a member of the College Council
- a member of the College Lay Advisory Group or a Lay Trustee
- a member of the College senior management team (where the complainant/subject of a complaint is an employee).

The Chief Executive may assist the Appeal Panels as required by the Chair, except where a College employee is the subject of a complaint.

Members of the Appeal Panel will not have had any previous involvement with the initial complaint to ensure a fresh perspective on the issue. Nor can a member of the Appeal Panel be a subject of the complaint.

The Appeal Panel will consider the appeal in light of written evidence presented and will afford the appellant the opportunity of a hearing to present their case in person. The Appeal Panel Chair will coordinate the time and date for the hearing.

The appellant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend. The friend may advise and counsel the complainant but will not be allowed to make statements or take any part in the proceedings.

The Appeal Panel may request corroborative evidence from the appellant, and may also seek evidence from any other person. All evidence must be received 20 working days prior to the hearing to ensure that all members of the Appeal Panel and the appellant can consider it.

The Appeal Panel may request any person to give evidence at the hearing. The Appeal Panel and the appellant may question any person before it.

The Appeal Panel Chair will inform the appellant, and, if any, the individual who has been the subject of the complaint, of the decision of the Appeal Panel, normally within 20 working days of the hearing. The appeal may or may not result in action being considered against an employee or volunteer. If the Chief Executive proposes to take action against an employee this would be subject to the normal employment process set out in the Handbook.

The decision of the Appeal Panel is final.

Workflow diagram

Submission of Complaint

- Complainant submits a written complaint to the Chief Executive or Honorary Secretary.
- Complaint must include: Name and contact details, Nature of the complaint, Individuals involved, Actions taken so far, Why the complainant is dissatisfied, Desired resolution, Supporting evidence

Complaint Acknowledgment

- Acknowledgment sent within 48 hours.
- Complaint must be submitted within one month of the issue.

Internal Investigation

- Complaint assigned to an independent investigator.
- Additional information may be requested (deadline: 10 working days).

Resolution Timeline

- Complaint resolved within 20 working days.
- If delayed, complainant is informed.

Request for Appeal

- Appeal assigned to an independent investigator.
- Decision on whether there are valid grounds:
 - No grounds → Decision communicated within 20 working days (Final decision).
 - Grounds present → Appeal Panel convened within 40 working days.

Participation

The College encourages feedback about all the activities we provide as it helps us identify areas for improvement and innovation.

Throughout the complaints process the College expects all parties to treat each other with dignity and respect.

The College has a set of values and behaviors that staff, volunteers and members are expected to uphold. These are available on our [website](#).

Whether you are a complainant or an individual who has been the subject of a complaint, it is expected that you will follow this procedure and engage with the process.

Failure to engage with our Complaints Policy may result in a decision being taken based on the evidence to hand, or the case may be closed due to a lack of information. This decision will be taken after the 10-working day deadline for the provision of additional information requested has passed.

Failure to follow College policies may also result in a complainant or person complained against having sanctions invoked. These may include removal from College committee roles, being reported to the General Medical Council and/or their membership of the College being rescinded (as per College Ordinances) depending on the severity of the specific situation.

Persons Named in a Complaint

Any person who is the subject of a complaint shall be entitled to view all the paperwork submitted in connection with that complaint and make representations to the Appeal Panel. All documentation must be shared with the subject of a complaint four weeks in advance of the Appeal Panel meeting.

Record keeping

A central register of formal complaints will be maintained by the College. This will detail the nature of complaints and the outcomes which will be reviewed on a periodic basis by the College's Trustee Board.

This will detail the nature of complaints, their outcomes and how long the complaint process took to complete in each case. The register will be reviewed on a periodic basis by the College's Trustee Body so that lessons may be learnt and processes improved.

Transparency

The College reserves the right to make the outcome of complaints public knowledge.

Review

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