Student Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how students and applicants can raise a concern about BIRD's service, facilities or the wider student experience, and how BIRD will respond.

This policy is built around the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education's (OIA) Good Practice Framework, which sets out good practice for partnership arrangements such as BIRD's relationship with the University of Greenwich. BIRD uses the OIA's definition of a complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction about something a provider has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider.

Most concerns are best raised and resolved close to the time they happen. Where a concern is raised significantly after the event, BIRD's ability to investigate or put things right may be limited.

This policy is published on BIRD's website and is available to all current students and applicants.

2. Our Principles

BIRD's complaints process is built around the OIA's five good practice principles. A good process should be:

a) **Accessible and clear**: easy to find, easy to follow, and explained in plain language, with students told who is doing what and when.
b) **Fair, independent and confidential**: decisions taken by people who weren't already involved, with clear reasons given and information handled with care.
c) **Inclusive**: students are not disadvantaged for making a complaint, and are treated with respect throughout.
d) **Flexible, proportionate and timely**: concerns resolved as early and informally as possible, with no more than three stages and clear time limits.
e) **Focused on improving the student experience**: learning is captured and used to make things better.

3. Scope

This policy covers complaints about BIRD's own services, facilities, teaching environment, administration, and the wider student experience.

BIRD holds a partnership agreement with the University of Greenwich. Academic matters, including assessment, academic appeals, academic misconduct and decisions about awards, are governed by the University of Greenwich's own academic regulations and are dealt with under Greenwich's procedures, not this policy. If a concern is about a mark, a piece of feedback, an assessment decision, or an allegation of academic misconduct, this is not the right policy.

This policy is the first stage for every BIRD student, including those studying on a University of Greenwich programme. Students on a Greenwich programme should not go directly to the University of Greenwich with a non-academic concern. Section 10 explains what happens if a student on a Greenwich programme is still dissatisfied once BIRD's process has concluded.

This policy does not cover:

a) allegations of bullying or harassment, dealt with under the Anti-Bullying Policy or the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy
b) concerns that a student or member of staff may be subject to disciplinary action, dealt with under BIRD's disciplinary procedures
c) staff grievances, dealt with through HR procedures
d) safeguarding concerns, dealt with under the Safeguarding Policy, alongside any related complaint

4. Who Can Complain

Current students, former students, and applicants can raise a complaint under this policy.

Former students should normally raise a complaint within 3 months of leaving BIRD. BIRD will apply this deadline flexibly and will consider a complaint made later where the former student has a good reason for the delay.

Applicants can complain about how their application or admission was handled. Only current or former registered students, not applicants, can take a complaint to the OIA once BIRD's process is complete.

BIRD does not normally accept anonymous complaints, because this limits BIRD's ability to investigate, respond, and issue a Completion of Procedures letter, without which a student cannot ask the OIA to review their case. BIRD may exceptionally look into an anonymous complaint that raises a safeguarding concern or a matter affecting a number of students, though it will not always be able to follow the full process set out in this policy in those cases. Students who don't want to give their name are still entitled to have a named complaint handled as confidentially as possible.

Staff complaints are not accepted under this policy.

Students under 18 can raise a complaint in their own right. Where a concern raised by, or about, a student under 18 also raises a safeguarding issue, it will be referred under the Safeguarding Policy in parallel with this policy. BIRD may contact a parent or guardian in the course of resolving a complaint involving a student under 18, in line with the Safeguarding Policy

5. Support and Representation

A student can be accompanied or supported at any stage by a peer, a member of staff, a family member or guardian, or an independent adviser, for example from the Greenwich Students' Union (GSU) Advice Service which is available to BA students. The companion may support the student but does not represent them or answer on their behalf. Legal representation is not normally permitted, and will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances, such as where a case is particularly complex or where the potential outcome for the reported party is especially serious. Any legal representation must be agreed with BIRD in advance of the hearing. Where a student brings a legal representative to a hearing without that prior agreement, BIRD may decline to allow the representative to take part, adjourn the hearing, or take other steps it considers appropriate.

BIRD will consider reasonable adjustments to this process for disabled students, or students who need extra support to take part, and will keep a record of any adjustments made.

6. Overview of Timeframes

The table below summarises the timeframes referred to elsewhere in this policy.

Stage	What happens	Target time
Early resolution	Raised directly with a tutor, service, or Head of Service	As soon as possible; no fixed deadline
Formal complaint	Submitted using the complaints form	Within 40 calendar days of the issue, or 5 days after early resolution ends
Formal complaint	Acknowledged, with investigator named	Within 5 working days of receipt
Formal complaint	Written outcome provided	Within 28 calendar days of receipt, or of any meeting
Review	Requested under the Appeals Procedure	Within 14 calendar days of the formal outcome
Review	Outcome and Completion of Procedures letter issued	Within 28 calendar days of the review concluding
Overall	Formal stage and review combined	Normally within 90 calendar days of the formal complaint being received
OIA	Student can ask the OIA to review the case	Within 12 months of the Completion of Procedures letter

BIRD will move faster than these targets where a case is having a serious effect on a student's mental health, where the student is very distressed, or where the issues are highly sensitive. Where a target can't be met, BIRD will tell the student why and give a revised timescale.

7. Stage One: Early Resolution

Students should raise a concern as soon as possible, directly with a tutor or the relevant service (for example, Finance or Registry). If a student doesn't feel able to approach a tutor directly, they can contact the relevant Head of Service.

Early resolution might include a conversation to explain a decision, an apology, or a member of staff stepping in to sort out a practical issue. Students don't need to use a particular form, or put an early resolution concern in writing, though they can if they prefer.

A formal complaint may be the right starting point, rather than early resolution, where the issue is complex or serious, involves an allegation about the conduct of a staff member, or is raised by a former student who no longer has an ongoing relationship with BIRD through which to resolve it informally.

8. Stage Two: Formal Complaint

A student should use the formal stage if they're not satisfied with the outcome of early resolution, or if early resolution isn't suitable for one of the reasons above.

To make a formal complaint, complete the complaints form, setting out the nature of the complaint, any supporting evidence, and what has already been done to try to resolve it informally.

Formal complaints should be submitted within 40 calendar days of the issue complained of, or within 5 calendar days of the end of an informal stage, whichever is later. BIRD will apply this deadline flexibly, taking into account the student's circumstances, how serious the issue is, and whether it's still realistically possible to investigate. Complaints received well outside this timeframe, with no good reason for the delay, will normally be treated as feedback rather than progressed formally.

BIRD will check that the complaint has been made under the right procedure, and will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days, telling the student who will be investigating their complaint and roughly when to expect a response.

The person investigating a formal complaint will not normally have been involved in the events complained about. BIRD is a small institution, so where it isn't possible to find someone with no prior involvement, BIRD will use a staff member who is as removed as possible from the matter, or agree a suitable investigator with the student.

Where appropriate, and if both the student and the other party agree, BIRD may offer mediation or another form of informal resolution at this stage.

The investigation may include a meeting with the student and conversations with relevant staff. The student may bring a supporter to any meeting (see section 5). BIRD may appoint an independent investigator to investigate a complaint where appropriate.

BIRD aims to provide a written outcome within 28 calendar days of the formal complaint being received, or of any investigation meeting, whichever is later, with clear reasons for the decision.

9. Stage Three: Review

If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal stage, they can ask for a review. Reviews are considered under BIRD's Appeals Procedure, which sets out the grounds for a review, how to submit one, and the timeframe for doing so.

A review is not a re-investigation of the original complaint. It checks whether the formal stage was handled fairly and reasonably, not whether a different decision would have been preferable.

Details of how to request a review, including a copy of the Appeals Procedure, will be provided alongside the outcome of the formal complaint.

10. Students on University of Greenwich Programmes

Students on a University of Greenwich programme use this policy in exactly the same way as any other BIRD student, and BIRD's process is always the first stage.

Where a complaint appears to touch on the Greenwich programme, BIRD will flag this to the student early, normally when the formal complaint is acknowledged, and explain that part of the complaint may need to go to the University of Greenwich once BIRD has looked into it. This is an early heads-up, not a decision about how the complaint will ultimately be split.

Once BIRD reaches a formal outcome (see section 8) or a review outcome (see section 9), BIRD will tell the student which of the following applies to their complaint.

10.1. Complaint Solely About BIRD's Own Service

Where the complaint is entirely about BIRD's own facilities, service or the wider student experience, it is concluded within BIRD's process, and BIRD issues the Completion of Procedures letter in the usual way (see section 16).

10.2. Complaint Solely About the Greenwich Programme

Where a student on a Greenwich programme has completed BIRD's process, including any review under the Appeals Procedure, and remains dissatisfied, and the complaint is solely about an aspect of their Greenwich programme, they have a further right of recourse to the University of Greenwich Final Review Procedure. This sits between the end of BIRD's process and any referral to the OIA, and is separate from both. In this case BIRD will not issue a Completion of Procedures letter. Instead, BIRD will explain to the student how to take their complaint to the University of Greenwich, and the University of Greenwich will issue the Completion of Procedures letter once its own process has concluded.

10.3. Complaint That Touches Both

BIRD will consider the complaint as a single process wherever practicable, rather than splitting it into two separate procedures. BIRD will investigate and reach a view on the elements within its own remit, and its outcome or review letter will state which elements, if any, sit outside BIRD's remit because they concern the Greenwich programme specifically. Where that applies, BIRD will

not issue a Completion of Procedures letter for those elements. Instead, BIRD will explain how the student can pursue that part of their complaint with the University of Greenwich under the Final Review Procedure, and the University of Greenwich will issue the Completion of Procedures letter for that element once its own process has concluded.

11. More Than One Process

Some concerns don't sit neatly under one policy, or touch on both BIRD's remit and the University of Greenwich's academic regulations. Where this happens, BIRD will decide how to proceed, and will tell the student which process, or combination of processes, applies, who will coordinate it, and who will make the final decision.

Where a concern needs to be considered under more than one procedure, BIRD will try to avoid asking a student to provide the same evidence more than once, and will explain any implications of running more than one process, for example if one is paused until the other concludes.

12. Group Complaints

Where several students want to raise the same concern, they can submit a single group complaint. BIRD may ask the group to nominate one representative to correspond with on the group's behalf. A group complaint follows the same three stages as an individual complaint

13. Complaints About the Conduct of a Student or Member of Staff

Where a complaint raises a concern that a student or member of staff may have behaved in a way that breaches BIRD's expected standards of conduct, BIRD may refer the matter to its disciplinary procedures for consideration alongside, or instead of, this policy. The complainant will be told which process their concern is following.

Complaints specifically about bullying or harassment should be raised under the Anti-Bullying Policy or the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy, which have their own reporting routes.

14. Confidentiality

BIRD will handle complaints with an appropriate level of confidentiality, sharing information only with those who need it to investigate or respond, and reminding anyone involved that they're expected to keep it confidential.

A student can ask for their complaint, or part of it, such as a witness statement or medical evidence, to be kept confidential. BIRD will balance this against what the investigation needs, and will explain if information can't be withheld.

BIRD will not ask a student to sign a confidentiality agreement or non-disclosure agreement as a condition of resolving or settling a complaint.

Where a student shares information relevant to their continued studies, for example about a disability, BIRD will discuss with them whether and how that information should be shared internally

15. Complaints With No Reasonable Purpose

BIRD takes all complaints seriously, but recognises that a small number are not made in good faith. BIRD may decide not to continue considering a complaint that:

a) has already been considered and decided by BIRD
b) is, in the view of a fair-minded person, trivial
c) is being pursued in a way that is having a seriously negative effect on staff or on BIRD's work
d) seeks a remedy that has no reasonable purpose or value

If BIRD decides to stop considering a complaint on these grounds, it will write to the student explaining why, and tell them how to challenge that decision and by when.

Where an investigation separately finds that a complaint was made maliciously, BIRD may treat this as a conduct matter in its own right under the disciplinary procedures.

16. Completion of Procedures and the OIA

Once BIRD's internal process is complete, whether at the end of the formal stage (if no review is requested) or at the end of a review, BIRD will issue a Completion of Procedures (CoP) letter within 28 calendar days. This confirms that BIRD's process has ended, explains the outcome and the reasons for it in plain language, and tells the student about their right to take the matter to the OIA and the time limit for doing so. For students on a University of Greenwich programme, whether BIRD or Greenwich issues the CoP letter depends on which of the outcomes in section 10 applies.

Students who remain dissatisfied after receiving a CoP letter can ask the OIA to review their complaint, provided it's eligible under the OIA's rules. Students must submit a complaint to the OIA within 12 months of the date of the CoP letter.

17. Recording, Learning and Accountability

BIRD keeps a record of complaints, including their nature, how they were resolved, and how long they took, in order to identify patterns and improve. A summary is reported periodically to the Academic and other committees as appropriate, which may include student representatives.

18. Document Control

Document type:	Policy		
Document number:	018	Version:	2.0
Department:	Registry		
Approved by:	Academic Board	Date approved:	16/07/2026
Effective from:	01/08/2026	Review date:	15/07/2029
Publication:	BIRD website		
Related documents:	Appeals Procedure Anti-Bullying Policy Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy Safeguarding Policy Alcohol and Drugs Policy Student Code of Conduct Disciplinary policy University of Greenwich Final Review Procedure (for students on Greenwich programmes, see section 10)		
Documents replaced:	Complaints Policy		
Notes:	Structural changes • Retitled from "Complaints Policy" to "Student Complaints Policy" • Rebuilt around the OIA Good Practice Framework, both the Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals section and the Delivering Learning Opportunities with Others section, with an explicit compliance statement • Added an OIA principles section, a timeframes-at-a-glance table, and a public availability statement Who can complain • Former students can now raise a complaint, within 3 months of leaving, benchmarked against Greenwich's own policy. The previous version excluded ex-students entirely • Anonymous complaints are no longer a flat exclusion. BIRD may exceptionally look into one where it raises a safeguarding concern or affects multiple students • Added explicit provision for students under 18, cross-referenced to the Safeguarding Policy Timeframes • Formal outcome target extended from 14 to 28 calendar days, benchmarked against Greenwich, Rose Bruford and Trinity Laban, since the previous 14-day target was tighter than any comparator institution • Added an explicit 90-calendar-day overall target for formal stage plus review, and a 28-day target for issuing the Completion of Procedures letter New provisions not in the previous version • Representation and support section • Mediation as an option at the formal stage • Investigator independence, including how this is handled given BIRD's size		

	• Group complaints • Expanded confidentiality section, including a commitment not to use NDAs • Expanded no-reasonable-purpose section with named criteria and a right to challenge that decision • More than one process section, for concerns spanning more than one BIRD policy New section: students on University of Greenwich programmes • Confirms BIRD's process is the first stage for all students, including those on Greenwich programmes • Sets out the route to the University of Greenwich Final Review Procedure for complaints solely about the Greenwich programme, once BIRD's process is exhausted, including when BIRD does and doesn't issue the Completion of Procedures letter • Sets out BIRD's interim approach to complaints that touch both BIRD's own service and the Greenwich programme, flagged as not yet agreed with Greenwich and due to be confirmed Related policies Added references to the future Disciplinary Policy and the University of Greenwich Final Review Procedure