Arthur Findlay College

PIONEERING SPIRITUALISM
& PSYCHIC SCIENCES

**Spiritualists' National Union (SNU) & Arthur Findlay College (AFC)**

AFC Complaints Policy

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# 1. Purpose

Arthur Findlay College (AFC) is committed to providing a safe, welcoming and high-quality educational experience for all students, visitors and guests.

The College recognises that, despite the best intentions of staff and volunteers, concerns may occasionally arise regarding the services, facilities or conduct experienced during a visit.

This policy explains how concerns and complaints can be raised, how they will be managed and the standards individuals can expect throughout the process.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- encourage concerns to be raised promptly so that they can be resolved wherever possible;
- provide a fair, transparent and proportionate complaints process;
- ensure complaints are investigated using the best available evidence;
- promote organisational learning and continuous improvement; and
- provide confidence that concerns will be treated respectfully and impartially.

## Principles of the Complaints Process

Arthur Findlay College is committed to managing all concerns and complaints in a manner that is fair, transparent, timely and proportionate. The purpose of the complaints process is not simply to determine whether a complaint is upheld, but to ensure concerns are considered objectively, decisions are based on evidence, and opportunities for organisational learning are identified.

In managing complaints, the College will be guided by the following principles:

**Fairness:**

All concerns will be considered impartially, without prejudice, and with due regard to the information provided by all parties.

**Timeliness:**

Concerns should be raised as soon as reasonably practicable to enable issues to be resolved promptly and to ensure that evidence remains available. The College is committed to managing complaints within published timescales wherever reasonably possible.

**Early Resolution:**

Where appropriate, the College will seek to resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity, recognising that many issues can be addressed quickly during a student's stay without the need for a formal investigation.

**Evidence-Based Decision Making:**

Decisions will be based upon the available evidence and assessed on the balance of probabilities. The College will consider all relevant information fairly and objectively before reaching its conclusions.

**Proportionality:**

The College will ensure that the response to a concern is proportionate to the nature, seriousness and complexity of the issues raised. Not every concern will require a formal investigation, and wherever appropriate, matters will be resolved through discussion, explanation or local resolution.

**Respect and Dignity:**

All individuals involved in the complaints process will be treated with courtesy, dignity and respect. The College expects complainants, witnesses and staff to engage with the process respectfully and in good faith.

**Confidentiality:**

Complaints will be managed with appropriate sensitivity and confidentiality. Information will only be shared where it is necessary to investigate the complaint, comply with legal obligations or safeguard individuals.

**Organisational Learning:**

The College is committed to learning from complaints and concerns. Where appropriate, investigations may identify opportunities to improve policies, procedures, accessibility, communication, training or service delivery, regardless of whether a complaint is upheld.

**Natural Justice:**

The College is committed to the principles of natural justice. Individuals who are the subject of a complaint will be informed of the substance of the allegations where appropriate and will be given a fair opportunity to respond before findings are reached. Investigations will be conducted impartially, with decisions based solely on the available evidence.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to concerns and complaints relating to services provided by Arthur Findlay College, including:

- accommodation;
- catering;
- accessibility;
- customer service;
- administration;
- facilities;
- tutors and course delivery;
- student welfare;
- safeguarding matters (where appropriate);
- conduct of staff
- health and safety matters.

Where a concern falls under another College or Spiritualists' National Union policy, including safeguarding, disciplinary or whistleblowing procedures, the College reserves the right to manage the matter under the most appropriate procedure.

## 3. Our Commitment

Arthur Findlay College aims to resolve concerns at the earliest possible opportunity.

Many issues can be resolved quickly during a student's stay when staff are made aware of them. Early resolution often provides the best outcome for everyone involved and allows the College to take immediate action where appropriate.

Students will never be disadvantaged for raising genuine concerns in good faith.

The College will:

- treat all concerns fairly and respectfully;
- investigate complaints objectively;
- keep complainants informed of progress;
- maintain appropriate confidentiality;
- identify learning opportunities where appropriate; and

- continually improve services through feedback received.

## 4. Raising A Concern

A **concern** is an issue that the College has the opportunity to resolve during your stay.

Examples include:

- **Accommodation** – including concerns regarding room allocation, cleanliness or facilities. Students requiring specific accommodation due to a disability, medical condition or accessibility need should notify the College before arrival. Whilst the College will make every reasonable effort to meet individual requirements, room allocations are made in advance based on the information provided at the time of booking and availability.
- catering requirements;
- accessibility support; including reasonable adjustments, mobility support, communication needs or support for disabilities. Students are encouraged to inform the College of any accessibility requirements before attending so that appropriate arrangements can be planned wherever reasonably practicable. Where accessibility needs are identified after arrival, the College will make reasonable efforts to provide support; however, some adjustments may be limited by the College's historic Grade II listed environment, accommodation availability or operational constraints.
- maintenance issues; including faults, damage, equipment failures or health and safety concerns identified within College buildings or grounds.
- housekeeping; including room cleanliness, linen, servicing of accommodation or standards of hygiene
- Tutors and Course Delivery: including concerns regarding professional conduct, behaviour, learning environment or adherence to College policies. *(This policy does not provide a route to challenge a tutor's teaching philosophy, style or spiritual beliefs unless there is evidence of misconduct, discrimination or a breach of College policy.)*

Students are encouraged to raise concerns as soon as reasonably practicable with Reception, the Duty Manager, Safeguarding Manager or another appropriate member of staff.

Where possible, the College will seek to resolve concerns immediately.

Where concerns cannot be resolved locally, they may progress to a formal complaint.

### Student Responsibilities

To enable the College to provide appropriate support and investigate concerns fairly, students are expected to:

- Provide accurate booking information, including any disability, medical condition or accessibility requirements that may require reasonable adjustments.
- Notify the College of any specific accommodation requirements before arrival.
- Raise concerns as soon as reasonably practicable so that the College has an opportunity to resolve them during the course where possible.
- Treat staff, volunteers and other students with courtesy and respect throughout the complaints process.
- Provide accurate and truthful information when raising a concern or complaint.

## 5. Formal Complaints

A formal complaint should only be made where:

- the concern could not be resolved during the student's stay;
- the matter is sufficiently serious to require formal investigation; or
- the complainant was unable to raise the concern at the time for a justifiable reason.

Complaints should be submitted in writing to:

**The General Manager & Deputy Manager**

Arthur Findlay College
Stansted Hall
Stansted Mountfitchet
Essex
CM24 8UD

or Email: Complaints@arthurfindlaycollege.org

## 6. Time Limits

To ensure complaints can be investigated fairly whilst evidence remains available, formal complaints should normally be submitted within 28 calendar days of the end of the course or residential stay.

Complaints received outside this timeframe will not normally be accepted unless the complainant can demonstrate exceptional circumstances that prevented the complaint from being submitted earlier.

When deciding whether to accept a complaint outside the normal timeframe, the College may consider:

- the reason for the delay;
- whether relevant evidence remains available;
- whether witnesses are still available;
- whether a fair investigation remains possible; and
- whether there are safeguarding or legal considerations requiring investigation.

The College reserves the right not to investigate complaints where excessive delay would make a fair and reliable investigation impossible.

## 7. What Should Be Included in a Complaint

To assist a fair investigation, complaints should include wherever possible:

- the complainant's name and contact details;
- dates and times of events;
- location of the incident;
- names of those involved (where known);
- names of any witnesses;
- a clear description of the concern;
- any supporting documents or photographs;
- details of any steps already taken to resolve the matter; and
- the outcome being sought.

Anonymous complaints will only be considered where there is evidence of significant risk, safeguarding concerns or serious misconduct.

## 8. How Complaints Are Managed

Upon receipt of a formal complaint, the College will undertake an initial assessment to determine the most appropriate way to manage the matter.

This assessment may consider:

- whether the complaint falls within the scope of this policy;
- whether it has been submitted within the required timescale;
- whether sufficient information has been provided to enable an investigation;
- whether the matter has already been considered or determined;
- whether the complaint would be more appropriately managed under another College or Spiritualists' National Union policy or procedure (including safeguarding, disciplinary, whistleblowing or grievance procedures); and
- whether immediate action is required to safeguard the wellbeing of students, staff or visitors.

Following the initial assessment, the College may:

- seek further information from the complainant;
- attempt informal resolution;
- commence a formal investigation;
- refer the matter to another appropriate process; or
- decline to investigate where the complaint falls outside the scope of this policy.

## 9. Investigation Process

Where a formal investigation is considered appropriate, the College will appoint a suitable Investigating Officer or Investigation Panel.

Investigations will be conducted fairly, impartially and proportionately.

The investigation may include:

- review of written evidence;
- interviews with relevant individuals;
- review of booking records, correspondence or College records;
- consideration of photographs, CCTV (where available), or other documentary evidence;

- consideration of relevant College policies and procedures.

The College will normally:

- acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days;
- provide updates where investigations are likely to exceed 20 working days;
- aim to conclude investigations within 60 working days, although more complex matters may require additional time.

The standard of proof applied will be the balance of probabilities. This means the Investigating Officer or Panel will determine whether it is more likely than not that the events occurred as alleged.

# 10. Outcomes

Following the investigation, the complainant will receive a written outcome.

Possible findings include:

- **Not Upheld** – the available evidence does not support the complaint.
- **Partially Upheld** – some aspects of the complaint are supported by the evidence.
- **Upheld** – the complaint is supported by the evidence.

Where appropriate, the outcome may include:

- an explanation of the findings;
- recommendations for service improvements;
- staff guidance or training;
- changes to College procedures;
- mediation or restorative discussions where appropriate;
- goodwill gestures, including refunds where considered appropriate.

The College may identify organisational learning even where a complaint is not upheld.

## Appeals

Arthur Findlay College recognises that, on occasion, a complainant may believe there has been a significant procedural error or that relevant evidence was not considered during the investigation.

A complainant may request a review of the outcome within 14 calendar days of receiving the written decision.

An appeal will only be considered where one or more of the following grounds apply:

- New evidence has become available that could not reasonably have been provided during the original investigation and which may materially affect the outcome.
- There was a significant procedural irregularity which may have affected the fairness of the investigation.
- The outcome was manifestly unreasonable in light of the evidence considered.

An appeal will not be accepted simply because the complainant:

- disagrees with the findings;
- wishes the evidence to be reinterpreted;
- wishes to submit information that could reasonably have been provided during the original investigation; or
- is dissatisfied with the outcome.

The Chair of the Arthur Findlay College Committee (or another independent person nominated by the Committee where appropriate) will undertake an initial assessment of the appeal to determine whether it meets the grounds for review.

The Appeal Reviewer may:

- decline the appeal where the grounds are not met;
- uphold the original decision;
- direct that specific aspects of the complaint be reconsidered; or
- where appropriate, direct that a further investigation be undertaken.

The decision of the Appeal Reviewer shall be **final**, and there is no further internal right of appeal.

## 11. Matters Outside the Scope of this Policy

The following matters will not normally be investigated under this policy:

- complaints submitted outside the published time limits without exceptional justification;

- anonymous complaints, unless there is evidence of significant safeguarding concerns or serious misconduct;
- complaints that have already been fully investigated;
- complaints that are frivolous, vexatious or malicious;
- complaints relating solely to disagreement with spiritual philosophy, teaching methods or subjective learning experiences where there is no evidence of misconduct, discrimination or breach of College policy;
- matters that are the subject of legal proceedings or external regulatory investigation, where investigation would prejudice those proceedings.

The College reserves the right to discontinue or suspend an investigation where it becomes apparent that another process should take precedence.

## 12. Confidentiality

Complaints will be handled with appropriate sensitivity and confidentiality.

Information will only be shared with those who require it to investigate or manage the complaint appropriately.

Whilst the College will always seek to respect confidentiality, it cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality where:

- safeguarding concerns are identified;
- there is a legal obligation to disclose information;
- procedural fairness requires relevant information to be shared with those responding to allegations; or
- disclosure is necessary to protect individuals or the College.

All personal information will be processed in accordance with applicable data protection legislation.

## 13. Record Keeping

The College will maintain appropriate records relating to complaints, including:

- the complaint received;
- correspondence;
- evidence considered;

- investigation notes;
- findings;
- actions taken;
- recommendations; and
- organisational learning identified.

Records will be retained in accordance with the College's data retention schedule and applicable legal requirements.

The College may review complaint themes to identify trends, improve services and reduce future complaints.

## 14. Organisational Learning

Arthur Findlay College is committed to learning from concerns and complaints.

Following the conclusion of investigations, the College may:

- review policies and procedures;
- introduce additional staff training;
- improve accessibility arrangements;
- update student information;
- improve communication between departments;
- amend operational practices;
- review risk assessments; and
- monitor recurring themes through governance reporting.

The purpose of the complaints process is not solely to determine whether a complaint is upheld, but also to identify opportunities to improve the student experience.

## 15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner where required due to:

- legislative or regulatory changes;
- organisational learning;
- significant complaint themes;
- governance changes; or
- operational requirements.

The Arthur Findlay College Committee reserves the right to amend this policy at any time to ensure it remains effective, fair and proportionate.

## 16. Finality of Outcome

Once the complaints process, including any appeal, has concluded, Arthur Findlay College will consider the matter closed. The College will not normally enter into further correspondence regarding the same issues unless new and material evidence becomes available or there is a legal obligation to do so.