

AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Policy Name	ISMC Student Complaints Procedure
Approved by	Academic Standards Committee, AKU-ISMC
Date of Original Approval	3 March 2017
Contact	Director, ISMC or University Registrar

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Student Complaints Procedure is intended to enable students to bring matters of concern about their learning or other experience to the attention of the University (AKU) and / or the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (ISMC), and to enable investigation of those concerns with a view to reaching a satisfactory resolution.

2.0 Principles

2.1 The goal of the Complaints Procedure is to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved. Complaints will be handled sensitively and with due consideration for confidentiality in respect of students and staff.

2.2 Any person named in a complaint will be informed of the substance of the complaint and will have the right to reply as part of the investigation of that complaint. Information contained within the complaint will be made available only to those members of staff involved in its resolution. The Director, ISMC or head of the support unit associated with the complaint will also be informed.

2.3 It is expected that, other than in exceptional and fully documented circumstances, a student who seeks to make a complaint will invoke the Informal Procedure within 15 working days of the incident that forms the substance of the complaint.

2.4 Any student bringing a complaint under this Procedure, whether successfully or otherwise, will be treated no less favourably by any member of faculty or staff than if the complaint had not been brought. If evidence to the contrary is found in this regard, the member of faculty or staff may be subject to disciplinary proceedings under AKU policy.

2.5 Students are to be encouraged at any time to seek assistance or advice from the Director, ISMC in relation to any dissatisfaction concerning their learning experience.

3.0 Scope and Definitions

3.1 For the purposes of these procedures, a student shall mean and include any person enrolled at the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations in a course or programme leading to an undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate certificate, diploma or degree (from the date of admission to the date of graduation); in a non-credit course; or any person registered with

any other university or institution who has been accepted / approved for enrolment in a course, programme of study or training at the University.

3.2 A complaint is broadly defined as any expression of dissatisfaction that an ISMC service has not met the standards of service promised.

3.3 Service provision is defined as any aspect of ISMC's operation designed to provide an individual with a definable service. This would include academic provision in terms of quality of teaching, academic support services such as IT and technical support, library services, student administrative and support services, and accommodation and facilities.

3.4 Where a complaint is made or evidence provided anonymously or on behalf of a student, it would not be possible to undertake an investigation. Thus, action will not be taken in the event of complaints made anonymously and / or via a third party (this includes complaints made by a parent, spouse, partner, etc. of the student.)

3.5 The Director, ISMC reserves the right to discontinue with any complaint that is determined to be frivolous, malicious and/or vexatious.

3.6 Frivolous, vexatious and / or malicious actions in complaints are defined as:

- Complaints that are obsessive, harassing, or repetitive.
- Insistence on pursuing non-meritorious complaints and/or an unrealistic, unreasonable outcome.
- Insistence on pursuing what may be meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- Demands for redress that lack any purpose or value.

3.7 This Procedure should not be used to appeal against admission decisions; academic integrity decisions; final grade or application of University regulation decisions; harassment; or non-academic disciplinary decisions. Such appeals are considered under:

- ISMC's Admissions Appeal Policy;
- Student Academic Integrity Policy;
- Student Board of Academic Appeals;
- Student Anti-Harassment Policy;
- Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures, respectively.

4.0 Complaints Procedure

4.1 The Procedure is divided into two parts: i) an Informal Procedure, which emphasises mediation and resolution at the department / unit level where the complaint arose, and ii) a Formal Procedure.

4.2 The University Registrar / Assistant Registrar, ISMC will ensure that the Formal Procedure is operated according to due process and with regard to the stated timelines, with a view to resolving complaints as quickly as possible.

4.3 The University Registrar / Assistant Registrar, ISMC will monitor the progress of complaints through the Procedure and will ensure that records show the nature of the complaint, the manner and the timelines in which it was dealt and the outcome.

4.4 For the purposes of these Procedures, written communication may be in paper or electronic format.

5.0 Informal Procedure

5.1 It is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved through informal means. This means that resolution should be sought from the department / unit in which the complaint arose.

5.2 In certain situations, it may be appropriate to use mediation to resolve the complaint. In this situation, mediation should be agreed to by the relevant parties and undertaken with the assistance of someone trained in mediation techniques. The role of the mediator will be to make non-binding suggestions about how issues could be resolved to the satisfaction of all.

5.3 A student should normally expect to receive a written or verbal acknowledgement of their complaint within three working days of its submission, and a full written response to the complaint within 15 working days of the date of its receipt by the person hearing the complaint. This timescale may be extended as a result of public holidays and ISMC scheduled breaks / vacations.

6.0 Formal Procedure

6.1 If the response to the complaint at the informal stage is considered by the student to be unsatisfactory, s / he may invoke the Formal Procedure.

6.2 The complaint, marked confidential, should be submitted in writing to the University Registrar / Assistant Registrar, ISMC, who will log the complaint and acknowledge its receipt within three working days.

6.3 The written complaint should include:

- Details of the grounds for complaint.
- The steps taken to date to resolve the complaint informally.
- The reasons that the informal procedure was unsuccessful or inadequate.
- The form of resolution or redress sought.
- Any supporting documentation related to complaint.
- Signature and date.

6.4 The University Registrar / Assistant Registrar, ISMC will pass the complaint to the Director, ISMC, who will investigate the complaint. If the complaint involves the Director, then the University Registrar will appoint a suitable person to investigate the complaint. Such persons must be impartial and have no interest in the outcome of the complaint.

6.5 The Director, ISMC, or the person appointed to investigate the complaint, will produce a report that documents fully the issues raised by the complainant, the facts established by the investigation, the manner in which the facts were used to inform the judgement, and the

follow-up actions that will be undertaken. A copy of the response will be provided to the complainant and to the University Registrar.

7.0 Appeal

7.1 If the student considers the response to the Formal Procedure to be unsatisfactory or requests to have the ISMC Director's decision to discontinue a complaint reconsidered (cf. Section 3.5), he/she may invoke an Appeal. The request must be submitted in writing to the University Registrar within 15 working days of the date of the notification of the outcome of the Formal Procedure.

7.2 The request will be reviewed by the Provost who, having considered the substance of the complaint and the previous attempts at resolution, will decide whether or not the matter should be referred to a complaints hearing.

7.3 Normally, complaints will be referred to the Complaints Appeals Committee only where the Provost judges that:

- There has been demonstrably an irregularity in the proceedings at the Formal Procedure.
- Evidence has become available that it was not reasonable to present at the Formal Procedure.

7.4 In the event where the Provost judges that an appeal hearing is appropriate, a Complaints Appeals Committee will be convened. The Complaints Appeals Committee will be an *ad hoc* committee and shall consist of three members of the faculty and /or senior staff of the University appointed by the Provost, one of who shall be the Chairperson.

7.5 If the complaint relates to the actions of an individual member of staff, that individual has the right to be informed of the substance of the complaint and to attend and / or make a submission to the Complaints Appeals Committee.

7.6 The Complaints Appeals Committee shall meet, normally within 15 working days of the referral from the Formal Procedure.

7.7 It is anticipated that an Appeal of the Formal Procedure will normally be completed within 15 working days of the Committee being convened. The University Registrar / Assistant Registrar, ISMC will keep all parties informed of progress and the reason for any delay in proceedings if applicable.

7.8 The University Registrar will serve as administrative office / secretary to the Committee and keep all parties informed of progress and will advise of any necessary extension of the timelines.

7.9 The Complaints Appeals Committee will produce a report that documents fully the issues raised by the complainant, the facts established by the investigation, and the manner in which the facts were used to inform the judgement of the Committee and communicate its conclusions to the student within 15 working days of the completion of its investigation.

8.0 Outcomes of the Complaints Procedure

- 8.1 The decision of the Complaints Appeal Panel shall be final.
- 8.2 Should a complaint be upheld, the Chair of the Complaints Appeal Committee may make recommendations to Director, ISMC or the head of the support unit.
- 8.3 If a complaint is not upheld, the complainant will be informed in writing of the reasons for its rejection.
- 8.4 The report and recommendations will be communicated in writing to the complainant, to the Director, ISMC or the head of the support unit.