



Educational grievance frequently asked questions for trainees



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1.0 Purpose

To answer some frequently asked questions regarding the educational grievance policy and procedures.

2.0 FAQs

Are the policy and procedures live?

Yes. They were approved by GPTAC in January and are currently in implementation phase.

Why did we need these policy and procedures?

They create a structured mechanism for trainees to raise and resolve legitimate educational grievances in an open and transparent way. For every legitimate and documented grievance, the College aims to investigate and make recommendations consistently, promptly, impartially and fairly.

2.1 General

What is a legitimate educational grievance?

An educational grievance is generally a situation for which a trainee seeks some form of redress or a change to a current situation directly related to their training programme. The impact and effect on the trainee will (usually) have been significant and require a formal process of resolution. It is legitimate when an action or a situation is not in accordance with College rules, policies or procedures supported by facts and evidence. For every legitimate and documented grievance warranting review, the College aims to investigate and make recommendations consistently across the schemes and regions. Such investigations will be proportionate and reasonable compared to the severity of the allegations received.

How do I know my grievance is taken seriously?

The educational grievance policy sets out a mechanism for trainees to raise and resolve legitimate educational grievances in a non-adversarial manner and without fear of retaliation. It is supported by procedures outlining steps for the open and transparent assessment, investigation and resolution of grievances promptly, impartially and fairly.



Can I submit a grievance anonymously?

Usually, no. Anonymous complaints are often impossible to investigate because of the lack of information provided by the complainant who cannot be contacted. Normally, no action will be taken in the event of complaints made anonymously.

Why is it important to speak up when something is not right?

Submitting a legitimate grievance in good faith initiates a formal process within the College to respond fairly, transparently and objectively to a trainee's concerns. It's neither good nor bad. The grievance process is a mechanism geared toward important changes that benefit the trainee, others and the wider provision of the GP training programme.

2.2 Process

To whom do I submit a grievance?

Before submitting a grievance, speak to your Scheme Directing Team about your issues. Most routine complaints can be resolved on an informal basis without recourse to the formal grievance procedure. Trainees are encouraged to address any issues promptly. If the complaint relates to their assigned Trainer, the Trainee may choose to discuss the matter informally with the Scheme Directing Team. In the event of a conflict of interest the Trainee may choose to discuss the matter informally with the Complaints Officer. If an informal approach is unsuccessful, you can complete the grievance notification form and email it to the Complaints Officer at complaints.training@icgp.ie.

What steps should I take when completing the grievance notification form?

Being specific is very important so that the Complaints Officer, Case Manager and Case Investigator can adequately investigate and come to reasonable conclusions. First, you should clearly identify all points of concern and gather relevant information, including dates, individuals involved, rules, policies or procedures you believe have been infringed upon and reasons for dissatisfaction. Then, explore solutions: what resolution are you looking for and evaluate the reasonableness of your proposed solutions. Remain factual and collect evidence to support your complaint.

I submitted my grievance notification form. Now what?

The Complaints Officer will review your submission as quickly as possible and may ask you some follow up questions to make sure they fully understand your complaint and clarify the issues. Based on that, they'll confirm whether the complaint falls under the scope of the educational grievance policy and if it should proceed to an investigation. If an investigation is to begin, the Complaints Officer will identify a case manager.



How long does it take to get a decision after I submit my grievance?

It depends. While timely submission of a grievance is important to conduct an effective investigation, a timely investigation is important to come to a reasonable conclusion, avoid disruption to operations and to both you as the complainant and the subject. In the majority of cases, an investigation should be completed within 4 weeks. If it is suspected to take longer, the Case Manager or Complaints Officer will contact you to inform you of the delay.

Can I get an update on the status of the investigation?

After you are notified that your grievance will be investigated, please allow the investigation team the opportunity to complete their review. If delays occur beyond what would be a reasonable timeframe to complete the investigation (e.g. due to availability of people to interview or accessibility to documentation), the Case Manager or Complaints Officer will contact you. Please do not attempt to contact someone else at the College to get an update.

What's the point of an investigation? My complaint is straightforward.

When a trainee files a complaint, they know what steps the College will take to review it. The grievance and subsequent conclusion are documented. A formal way of raising and resolving complaints reduces the risk of escalated conflicts or legal issues, ensures consistency of approach across training schemes and allows for improvements to processes and procedures.

2.3 Interviews

I've been asked to attend an interview as a witness. Should I be worried?

Not at all. Interviews are common as part of the investigation process. A fact-finding exercise, they are meant to collect evidence and clarify any questions the investigator might have. Interviewees are encouraged to respond completely and truthfully.

I was interviewed as a witness in an investigation. Can I talk to the complainant about it?

While it is normal to sympathise with anyone involved in an investigation, confidentiality must be preserved to protect the integrity of the process and allow the investigation to proceed unhindered. Please do not discuss any involvement or any aspect of an investigation with anyone. If you believe your line manager should be informed, please speak to the Complaints Officer first.

Are interviews recorded?

Interviews are not audio or video recorded. However, someone (usually the case manager or investigator) takes written notes.

Can someone come with me to the interview?

The complainant may request the presence of a support person. A support person may be a family member, a senior clinical colleague not involved in training, or a union or legal representative.

2.4 Outcome

What are the possible outcomes of a grievance?

After you submit a grievance, the Complaints Officer must determine whether an investigation should take place and then inform you of next steps. If an investigation is warranted, the facts and evidence of the case will be reviewed. A case can be substantiated (i.e. the facts and evidence support your complaint), partially substantiated (i.e. the facts and evidence support some aspect of your complaint) or unsubstantiated (i.e. the facts and evidence do not support your complaint).

How do I know when the investigation is complete?

The Complaints Officer will contact you and the subject in writing to advise you both of the decision. The decision letter shall include whether the complaint was substantiated, partially substantiated or unsubstantiated and if appropriate, any consequent actions, or any recommendations that may be to other bodies or parties within the College to improve services based on the issues raised by the complaint or its handling.

Can a grievance result in disciplinary action?

Yes. If the grievance involves allegations against another individual such as a colleague or manager that are substantiated, then disciplinary action may be appropriate. The grievance will be investigated thoroughly before taking any disciplinary action. Disciplinary action may also be taken if the grievance submitted was vexatious or mischievous (i.e. not submitted in good faith).

The policy and procedures talk about sanctions. What does that mean?

A sanction can be an action taken against someone party to the complaint or recommended changes to rules, policies, processes. It can be broad and will vary with each case. Examples may include changes to curriculum, reallocation of the trainee, training site improvement requirements, inspection of training site, initiation of



the Disciplinary Policy, referral to the Medical Council, referral to the trainee/trainer's employer, referral to the College's trainee support process or Progression Review Committee.

My grievance was found to be unsubstantiated. Can I appeal the decision?

An appeal may be made, but it must relate to the process used to reach the decision, not of the actual decision and it must be submitted within 14 calendar days of receipt of a decision.

My grievance was found unsubstantiated and my request for appeal was denied. Should I be worried about my participation in the GP training programme?

The educational grievance policy makes a clear statement against retaliatory behaviour for complaints submitted in good faith and the process is non-adversarial. You will not be treated any differently than any other trainee by having submitted a complaint.

2.5 Examples

What are examples of an educational grievance?

Examples of possible complaints that may be raised by a trainee under the grievance policy include:

- o Unfair treatment by trainer (outside definition of bullying and harassment)
- o Unfair treatment by Training Director (National Specialty Director, Regional Programme Director, Scheme Directing Team, Clinical Lead) (outside definition of bullying and harassment)
- o Significant deficiencies in training such as granting study leave, access to protected training time, access to courses

I feel my ITER is unfair, but I don't know what to do.

Usually, an ITER may be deemed unfair if it is vague and does not clearly identify the issues sufficiently enough to allow you to address the problem. If this is the case, speak to your scheme directing team to try and get the report amended. If you still feel that the report does not accurately represent your performance, you can submit a grievance to the Complaints Officer.

I think my rota schedule is unfair. Can I send a complaint to get it changed?

No. Issues related to scheduling should be raised with your employer.

I've been denied study leave to prepare for my MICGP exams. Is this an educational grievance?

This may be a situation within the scope of the educational grievance policy. You can submit a grievance notification form to the Complaints Officer for assessment.



I've just come back from leave/holidays, and I'm scheduled to be on call 2 weekends in a row. It's not fair. What can I do?

This is a question of scheduling that is best addressed with your employer.

I think my trainer is giving preferential treatment to another trainee. Should I submit a grievance about it?

The situation may fall under the educational grievance policy. But you should first try to resolve the issue by talking to your trainer and/or your SDT team. If this proves unsuccessful, you can then complete the grievance notification form, and the Complaints Officer will review your complaint. If the nature of the case is out of scope, you will be notified and may be directed to another department or policy, or to your employer's HR department.

3.0 Contact

GP Training Quality Assurance and Enhancement

gae.training@icgp.ie