

THE FEDERATION OF THE ROYAL COLLEGES OF PHYSICIANS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The MRCP(UK) Central Office and the Examination Departments of the Royal Colleges of Physicians are committed to delivering a high quality service. As part of this commitment it is recognised that on occasion candidates may be dissatisfied with the way in which something has been done, and that complaints arising from this should be handled in a clear, fair and consistent way.
- 1.2 These Procedures apply to all candidates who consider that they have grounds for complaint regarding the provision of a service by the MRCP(UK), that does not amount to a request to review a decision made about their performance in an examination (see paragraph 2 below). These procedures may also be used to consider complaints by prospective candidates or any other party, if deemed appropriate by the MRCP(UK) Medical Director.
- 1.3 Complaints will not be considered if they are submitted anonymously or on behalf of another party, without that party's explicit consent in writing.
- 1.4 Candidates should note that by virtue of entering to sit an examination they are deemed to have understood and agreed to respect and abide by all relevant regulations, including these Complaint Procedures. All those submitting complaints are deemed to have understood and agreed to respect and abide by these Complaint Procedures.
- 1.5 Any dispute as to the interpretation of these Regulations shall be referred to the Medical Director, whose decision in the matter shall be final.

2 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 A 'complaint' is defined as an expression of a specific concern about the provision or quality of a service by the MRCP(UK), including issues such as staff conduct, disputes about the regulations, other procedures or the application thereof.
- 2.2 Any request for a review of a decision made by or on behalf of an Examining Board about the performance in an examination of a candidate or group of candidates is defined as an 'appeal' and as such will not be considered under these Procedures (but may instead be handled in accordance with the Examination Appeals Regulations).
- 2.3 It is recognised that on occasion it may be initially unclear whether a case constitutes a complaint or an appeal, hence the MRCP(UK) reserves the right to reclassify complaints to appeals or vice-versa at any stage in proceedings, in consultation with the person(s) complaining or appealing. Such reclassification will always be done so that the matter can be considered in the most appropriate and fair way, and candidates will not be required to resubmit their cases following any reclassification.
- 2.4 These procedures are not applicable in the following circumstances:
 - (i) If the complaint concerns a person or activity not subject to the jurisdiction of the MRCP(UK) Central Office or the College Examinations Departments;
 - (ii) If the complaint would be more appropriately handled by one of the Royal Colleges (in which case complainants will be referred to that Colleges' Complaints Procedure)

- (iii) If the complaint amounts to an allegation of criminal activity (which will be referred to the Police for separate consideration);
- (iv) If the complaint appears to be intended to delay or prevent the consideration of an allegation of academic misconduct.
- (v) If the complaint is related to formal disciplinary action being taken against any member(s) of staff, as disciplinary procedures take precedence over this procedure.

3 PROCEDURE

- 3.1 It is expected that complaints will be raised as quickly as possible, and no more than three months from the date in which the incident occurred.
- 3.2 All complaints should (i) be raised initially with the individual directly involved. The vast majority of complaints can and should be resolved in this way. If this does not resolve the matter, or this step is for any reason not possible or appropriate; (ii) the complaint is referred to the next relevant authority, usually the original individual's Line-Manager; and then if necessary (iii) referred on to the Head of Operations or the Head of Academic Division as appropriate.
- 3.3 It is a principle of this procedure that an informal and flexible approach to resolution of complaints will be adopted wherever possible.
- 3.4 Only once all attempts to resolve the complaint in accordance with paragraph 3.2 have been exhausted may a formal complaint be submitted to the MRCP(UK) Chief Operating Officer, who will reach a conclusion on the complaint and determine a course of action.
- 3.5 Formal complaints must be submitted in writing, stating (i) the nature of the complaint, (ii) what has / has not been done to resolve it, (iii) why the complainant is not satisfied with what has / has not been done, and (iv) what the complainant would like to be done to resolve the matter to their satisfaction. Complainants must make clear in the letter that it is a formal complaint they are submitting, and make clear to all other MRCP(UK) staff they may continue to have contact with that they have submitted a formal complaint.
- 3.6 All complaints will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt. Wherever possible a full response will be made within twenty working days of the date of the letter of receipt, unless extenuating circumstances exist in which case the complainant shall be informed of this and notified of the revised deadline for the response. Full reasons shall be given for the decision reached.
- 3.7 Candidates are assured that they have the opportunity to raise matters of legitimate concern through these Complaint Procedures without risk of disadvantage or criticism. Towards this end, the MRCP(UK) recognises the importance of confidentiality when handling complaints, and will maintain this as far as is possible during any investigation. However, it will occasionally be necessary to disclose a complainant's identity to progress an investigation. Candidates who are not willing for their identity to be disclosed in this way should make this clear in their letter of formal complaint.
- 3.8 The MRCP(UK) will take all necessary steps to support all parties involved in a complaint, and undertake all investigations sensitively and expeditiously.
- 3.9 All complaints will be considered on their individual merits, and all complainants will be treated equally.

- 3.10 If it is considered by the Chief Operating Officer that the complaint is vexatious, or malicious; or the complainant has used false information in a complaint, they may be liable for action to be taken under the Academic Misconduct Regulations.

4 APPEALS ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS

- 4.1 If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their formal complaint, they may appeal in writing to the MRCP(UK) Medical Director.
- 4.2 All appeals about complaints will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt. Wherever possible a full response will be made within twenty working days of the date of the letter of receipt, unless extenuating circumstances exist in which case the complainant shall be informed of this and notified of the revised deadline for the response.
- 4.3 The decision of the MRCP(UK) Medical Director is final, and candidates will be notified of this in their letter and that the complaints procedure is at an end.