

Trainee Complaints – Policy & Procedure

Background

The following policy relates to the principles and procedures for the handling of *Complaints* of an academic and non-academic nature from trainees. Trainee applicants may complain about the application process and/or its outcome, but they do not have a right of appeal against a decision on whether or not they should be offered a place at News Associates.

Principles Governing Complaints Procedures

The principles relating specifically to procedures for dealing with complaints are as follows:

1. complaints should be dealt with as close to their source, and as informally, as possible;
2. information on procedures, and on sources of advice, should be readily accessible;
3. appeals and complaints should be dealt with in accordance with News Associates Equal Opportunities and Particular Needs Policy for trainees, and procedures should be adapted, as appropriate, having regard to that Policy;
4. complaints should be dealt with within a reasonable time;
5. a complainant should have the right to be accompanied, within appropriate constraints, when appearing before any investigative panel;
6. an individual's privacy and confidentiality will be respected, subject to the need for a fair and open investigation and for the outcome of the investigation to be reported appropriately. This is in order both to protect the privacy of the complainant and to protect others, including members of staff, from unsubstantiated public allegations;
7. any complainant who has suffered a wrong has a right to have that wrong redressed, though vexatious or frivolous complaints should not be allowed to abuse the process;
8. procedures should ensure that, where a complaint is upheld, appropriate remedial action is taken;
9. members of an investigative panel should not be judges in their own case; or act in any case in which conflict of interest may arise;
10. News Associates should seek to minimise the cost to a complainant of pursuing a complaint;

11. successful complainants should have reasonable and proportionate expenses reimbursed by News Associates;
12. the available documentation should indicate which further procedures, if any, are open to a complainant who remains aggrieved following the outcome of a complaint;
13. a formal complaints procedure is available where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint;
14. a person who is the subject of a complaint should have the right to present a case during any investigation, and to be accompanied by a registered trainee or employee of News Associates.

Procedures

(a) Background

As a general principle, News Associates expects that complaints will normally be dealt with informally in the first instance. Complainants should seek to bring their complaint to the attention of News Associates using the procedure outlined here as soon as possible following the occurrence of a problem and ideally within one calendar month. Many complaints can be dealt with quickly and effectively in this manner, without recourse to formal procedures. News Associates' complaints procedure has been designed with this in mind.

No complainant will be disadvantaged by having raised a complaint, but News Associates expects that complainants will not make frivolous, vexatious or malicious complaints. Should a trainee be found to have made such a complaint, this may be dealt with under the trainee disciplinary procedures.

(b) Initial Complaints Procedure

Those who experience a problem with any service provided by News Associates or anything else within the control of News Associates, should normally first raise the matter with the person responsible or the head of journalism in their respective centre, either London or Manchester. If the matter relates to the head of journalism, or if informal discussion does not resolve the situation satisfactorily, the Course Director should be approached, in person or in writing. (If the initial complaint relates to Course Director, or equivalent, then at this point, there should be recourse to the formal procedure set out below). The complainant should state any remedy sought. A prompt response can be expected.

(c) Formal Complaints Procedure

- i. The formal complaints procedure should only be used where a complainant feels that the nature of the complaint is too serious to be dealt with under the initial complaints procedure, or where, after having already approached the Head of Journalism, or equivalent, a satisfactory conclusion has not been reached.

- ii. A formal complaint should be made in writing to the Course Director who will ensure that the matter is looked into as soon as possible. The complainant must indicate any remedy being sought. A written acknowledgement of any complaint can be expected within seven days of receipt. If the matter relates to the course director, then the deputy managing editor will lead the investigation.
- iii. The course director will determine whether the complaint will be investigated under this complaints procedure or whether it would be more appropriately investigated under the harassment, staff academic misconduct or staff disciplinary procedures. The complainant will be informed accordingly.
- iv. The course director may appoint one or more members of staff at News Associates to investigate the complaint on their behalf and report to them as a basis for their response. The investigator(s) may obtain information from and/or interview the complainant(s) and any other parties identified by the investigator(s) as relevant to the complaint.
- v. If a complainant is required to attend in person as part of the investigation into a complaint, they are entitled to be accompanied by a registered trainee or employee of News Associates.
- vi. After the completion of any investigation, the course director will send a considered written response to the complainant. Any proposed remedy should be implemented as soon as is practicable.
- vii. Should a complainant remain dissatisfied on receipt of the response from the course director, they can request that the course director refers the matter to the deputy managing editor (managing editor if the case was already investigated by the deputy managing editor) or independent course advisor. This is an experienced journalist, with no connection to the staff, who will undertake an independent and impartial assessment of the case and come to a conclusion on the matter.
- viii. Should a complaint be against the course director/managing editor and/or deputy managing editor, the complaint should be put in writing directly to the independent course ombudsman, whose details will be provided as part of course induction.
- ix. Should the independent course advisor decide it is necessary, they would be able to refer the matter directly to the National Council for the Training of Journalists to see if the matter has breached their policies. The complaints policy for the National Council for the Training of Journalists is available here: <https://www.nctj.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Complaints-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>

Updated September 2023