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Document Number	035	Document Revision	D	Date Issued 13/9/19

GENERAL INFORMATION			
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	Replicated same text as approved in MCAST Integrated Quality Management System Manual of Procedures, Chapter 1, Section 32 'Student and Staff Grievances'		

Instructions for document users with access to College website

All MCAST employees can access current, controlled and approved documents related to the Quality Management System via the College website www.mcast.edu.mt.

Document users are encouraged **NOT** to retain printed hard copies of the Quality Management System documents. If however a hard copy of the document is required, the user is to ensure before use that the printed document is the current revision.

Continuous Improvement

Procedures are meant to be 'living' documents that need to be followed, implemented and maintained. If the procedure does not reflect the current, correct work practice, it needs to be updated! Contact your Document Controller on Ext 7121 **today**. !

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(Note : The procedure below is extracted from (and hence replicated in) the MCAST Integrated Quality Management System Manual of Procedures Chapter 1 'People Management', Section 32 'Student and Staff Grievances').

32.1 Policy

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) spares no effort to ensure that all its community members, including full-time and part-time students and staff, operate in a conducive environment where they can live together guided by sound values of inclusion and respect in the light of social and cultural diversity.

In any human community, there are incidences of disagreement, when individuals or groups feel the need of voicing a divergent opinion, dispute decisions or distance themselves from sharing their community's ideals due to lack of self-confidence in obtaining their entitlements. Conflicts may lead to many other problems, including increased liabilities, negative publicity, and possibly lawsuits. A positive approach when handling concerns and complaints results in a better culture on MCAST Campus, where students and staff are the major beneficiaries of a more harmonious and authentic community spirit.

The scope for establishing the MCAST 'Grievance Office' is to address such issues. This office has the role of assisting MCAST students and staff to share and obtain advice about their concerns, complaints and grievances. The 'Grievance Office' seeks, above all, to promote and facilitate a culture of truthful dialogue in obtaining a solution for minor disagreements at source. Whenever it is necessary, the Deputy Principal responsible for the Grievance Office guides the complainant and the other party to reach an informal resolution to the satisfaction of all concerned. In cases of a more serious nature, the complainant is entitled to opt for a formal grievance procedure, where the Deputy Principal responsible for the Grievance Office investigates the grievance until a fair solution is reached.

Any grievance presented to the 'Grievance Office' under the formal procedure must be in writing. Only one grievance procedure may be employed for the same grievance. The Grievance Office is totally committed to the investigation of any grievance impartially, while priority is given to the communication of the Grievance Office's recommendations within realistic time frames throughout the process

This policy aims to ensure that problems among the MCAST community are dealt with in a timely manner, fairly and consistently. Two grievance procedures – one for students and another one for staff – are in place. Their provision enhances the transparency of the entire process. The 'Grievance Office' provides additional support for vulnerable MCAST members who may need more guidance in their individual circumstances.

The grievance procedure for staff and for students is distributed electronically to all students and staff at the start of an academic year. The Principal has the right to take the final decision in disciplinary matters or termination of employment.

32.2 Grievances at MCAST

The MCAST Grievance Office provides its services to all registered MCAST full-time and part-time students and staff. The overall aim is to actively promote and safeguard their well-being by dealing with their grievances and offering fair and adequate counsel to assist in bringing grievances to a satisfactory closure for the benefit of all concerned.

MCAST employees and students may contact the MCAST Grievance Office by phone (23987105), by email (anthony.saliba@mcast.edu.mt) or by visiting the Grievance Office at the Main Campus, Administration Building, Ground Floor, Room 116. All meetings require that complainants set up an appointment with the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office.

The Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office welcomes MCAST students and staff during normal College hours (0745-1745 hrs). Appointments to meet outside these hours may be agreed to accommodate complainants' individual requirements.

The MCAST Grievance policy and procedure have five underpinning principles:

- (a) full respect to the human dignity of all concerned,
- (b) handling of grievances under the strictest confidentiality,

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- (c) priority given to informal resolutions,
- (d) transparency of communication, and
- (e) the complainants' entitlement to be accompanied during the grievance hearing sessions.

Students who are sixteen years of age do not require parental presence during grievance hearing sessions unless they explicitly ask for such support.

Irrespective of their age, all complainants may opt to have a person of their own choice accompanying them during the proceedings of the MCAST Grievance Office.

Grievances are generally handled at the MCAST Grievance Office or on the MCAST main or satellite campuses.

A grievance is considered as an official expression of a complaint that may be resolved;

- (a) through a discussion between the parties concerned,
- (b) between the parties with the assistance of the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office, or
- (c) through the formal Grievance Procedure.

The Grievance policy for both students and staff is forwarded to all concerned at the start of each academic semester to ensure a proper dissemination of information about this policy. A copy of the MCAST Grievance policy and procedure is sent by email to all complainants once they submit their grievance.

The Grievance Office deals with all grievances in a timely manner, fairly and with the strictest confidentiality.

The formal grievance procedure is generally staggered over these five consecutive steps:

- (a) initial commitment to close a grievance through an informal resolution,
- (b) the option to go for a formal grievance procedure when a solution is not reached through an informal resolution,
- (c) the formal grievance hearing sessions conducted in a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation between the parties involved,
- (d) the final opinion of the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office, which is then presented to the MCAST Principal & CEO for his endorsement or otherwise, and
- (e) the complainant's entitlement to appeal.

When it is evident that an MCAST employee and / or student has to resort to the formal grievance procedure, the complainant has to fill in the 'Formal Student / Staff Grievance Procedure Form' (referenced below) with all the relevant details. Lack of details and signature on this Form may delay unnecessarily the handling of a grievance.

The Deputy Principal responsible for the Grievance Office will refer immediately any grievances that are related directly to him to the MCAST Principal & CEO.

The MCAST President or his representative is the Chairperson of the Grievances Appeals Board. The MCAST President, as Chairperson of the MCAST Grievances Appeals Board, may choose a member from the MCAST Deputy Principals or the MCAST Board of Governors who are in no way involved in the grievance.

The investigation of all grievances and the Final Opinion of the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office takes into consideration the MCAST regulations, policies and procedures, local legislation if and when applicable, such as the GDPR and the Education Act.

When the Grievance Office receives a grievance, the Deputy Principal acknowledges the receipt of the grievance within one working day from its receipt. This acknowledgment also includes the Unique Reference Number (URN) allocated for the grievance, which consists of the calendar year in digits, a hyphen and the number of the grievance in sequence of submission.

All basic complainants' data is registered on the 'Register of URNs.'

When the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office refers grievances to the MCAST Principal & CEO that somehow involve directly the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office, he also informs the complainant about this change.

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Prior to any form of investigation regarding any grievance submitted to the MCAST Grievance Office, the Deputy Principal responsible for this office will send by email a copy of the MCAST Grievance Policy & Procedure to the complainant. At the same time, the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office invites the complainant for an initial clarification meeting to ensure that there is a clear and commonly agreed understanding of the alleged grievance.

The Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office has the discretion to advise the complainant to discontinue the grievance in case the alleged grievance lacks any supporting evidence or when it is clearly established that the alleged complaint has no grounds to justify its investigation, or in cases when the grievance is 'void and frivolous' beyond reasonable doubt.

When it results at the initial meeting between the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office and the complainant that what is being reported is a matter that requires advice or some form of other in-house or external professional support, the Deputy Principal will indicate the way forward to the complainant by suggesting the most appropriate way forward for the well-being of the complainant.

The Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office will inform the party / parties against whom the grievance is addressed to make them aware of the grievance that somehow concerns them, providing them with a very brief summary of the grievance.

When it results that a grievance is already being investigated by another in-house and / or external competent body, such as the courts, the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office suspends the Grievance Office's investigation and informs the complainant about such decision.

When it is established that the complainant would like to opt for the formal grievance procedure, the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office will send the 'Formal Student / Staff Grievance Procedure Form' (referenced below) to the complainant, which the latter is expected to return to the MCAST Grievance Office filled in as indicated and duly signed.

The MCAST Grievance Office will keep a record of all documents, meetings and correspondence related to each grievance. This also includes case meeting notes and a record of all interviews held in relation to the grievance under investigation. A pdf copy of all the above documentation is replicated on an external storage system.

Within five days from the conclusion of the grievance investigation, the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office will conclude his Final Opinion Report, which is then forwarded to the MCAST Principal & CEO for his final endorsement, suggested amendments or complete refusal. The Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office will simultaneously send his Final Opinion to the complainant.

After the completion of his Final Opinion Report, the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office meets the MCAST Principal & CEO to clarify any issues regarding the grievance prior to the MCAST Principal & CEO's decision. The MCAST Principal & CEO puts his endorsement signature in Section B of the Grievance Office's Final Opinion Report when he is in agreement with the Final Opinion.

The Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office informs in writing the complainant about the outcome of his / her grievance and will offer him / her assistance in following any steps resulting from the Final Opinion affecting the complainant.

A week after the conclusion of the entire Grievance procedure, the complainant will receive a Customer Satisfaction Survey to return to the Deputy Principal Grievance Office either by email or anonymously through MCAST internal post by addressing it in a sealed envelope to the Main Reception at the MCAST Administration Building, Main Campus, MCAST – Paola.

Complainants who may wish to appeal against the MCAST Grievance Office Final Opinion may do so by immediately informing the MCAST Principal & CEO about their intention to contest the Final Opinion.

In any appeal, the Deputy Principal responsible for the MCAST Grievance Office will automatically forward all its findings and conclusions about the contested grievance report to the Chairperson of the MCAST Grievance Appeals Board.

Reference Documents

Doc 091: Formal Student / Staff Grievance Procedure Form