

Student Complaints procedures

Introduction

1. The University has clear procedures for dealing with student complaints which form part of its quality assurance system and reflect current best practice. Complaints from students are treated seriously without negatively affecting student rights or impartial judgement on academic progress or any other aspect of student life at the University.
2. These procedures are a means by which the University can resolve student complaints and address shortcomings. Through the procedures students enrolled or registered at the University may seek redress, wherever possible, for any disadvantage, injury, damage or distress caused by the University. The procedures are relevant to all categories of complaint and not only in relation to the University's requirement to provide teaching and facilitate learning.
3. **Academic Registrar.** The complaints procedures are approved by the Academic Board and managed by the Office of the Academic Registrar. It is the Academic Registrar who has the final responsibility for the procedures together with the authority to adjudicate upon any questions raised by a student, the Students' Union or member of staff in relation to any aspect of the procedures. In all cases the decision of the Academic Registrar shall be final.
4. **Student Complaints and Appeals Officers.** The Student Complaints Officers within each college and central support area have responsibility for the operation and management of the student complaints system at local level. It is the responsibility of Student Complaints Officers to manage, co-ordinate and monitor student complaints and ensure that the college or central support area implements the University Complaints procedures in full and liaises with the University Complaints Unit. The Student Complaints Officers shall provide the relevant Pro Vice Chancellor or Head of Service with a regular update of current cases.
5. **Students' Union.** A student complainant may obtain representation from the Students' Union. The Students' Union can also provide procedural advice to complainants.
6. **Disability.** Disabled students who require reasonable adjustments in order to undertake a complaint should contact the Academic Registrar's Office directly. Reasonable adjustments will be arranged in consultation with the student and where necessary the Central Disability team, Mental Health Adviser or College Disability Officers. Students may be asked to provide a copy of their Needs Assessment Report in order to inform the process.

The Procedures

General Guidance

7. All students should feel that they can bring issues of concern, difficulties or differences of opinion to the attention of the University. Students have a right to expect that they will be listened to and that their concerns will be investigated properly and dealt with fairly without fear of recrimination or penalty.
8. The University will always try to deal with concerns quickly and informally in order to seek an appropriate resolution. Where this is not possible the concern or problem must be dealt with formally. In such cases the complaint has to be lodged in writing using the Student Complaint Form. Forms can be obtained from College/School Administration teams, the Students' Union or the university website.
9. Complaints should be submitted as soon as possible, and before the commencement of the following academic year. Any delay in submitting a complaint will need to be fully explained and may be grounds for rejection. Students submitting complaints relating to a previous academic year will be required to provide a valid reason for not submitting the complaint at the time.
10. A student may raise a matter on his/her own or as part of a group. If students wish to lodge a complaint as a group a spokesperson should be identified.
11. If a complaint is considered to be vexatious or without reasonable purpose then the complaint will be referred to the Academic Registrar for review and a response to the student or students concerned. A Completion of Procedures letter will be sent to the complainant within 14 working days of the Academic Registrar making his/her decision.
12. **Issues excluded from the procedures**
 - 12.1 Complaints raised anonymously are not considered under the procedures. *(In certain exceptional circumstances anonymous complaints may be investigated at the sole discretion of the Academic Registrar).*
 - 12.2 Third party complaints are not considered under the procedures. Where appropriate, and at the sole discretion of the Academic Registrar, third party complaints relating to allegations of potential student misconduct could be referred for review under the Student Disciplinary Code.
 - 12.3 Complaints submitted by someone acting on behalf of the student unless the Academic Registrar considers it fair and reasonable in all the circumstances.

- 12.4 Complaints about any aspect of the admissions process should be raised under the Admissions Procedure.
- 12.5 Complaints from former students should be raised with the Academic Registrar's Office. All complaints must be raised within 3 months of a student leaving the University and complaints received after this time will not normally be considered. A student is considered as having left the University on the date of their last Exam Board result. Former students must provide good reasons for not raising the complaint whilst they were at the university. The Academic Registrar has the sole discretion to consider complaints outside the time limit.
- 12.6 Complaints raised by students enrolled at another institution on a course leading to an award of the University. *(Except in circumstances where students who are enrolled at another institution have reached the end of that institution's procedures and demonstrate that there was a material or administrative or procedural error in the operation of the other institution's procedures and the Academic Registrar considers it fair and reasonable in all the circumstances to permit a complaint.)*
- 12.7 Complaints in relation to the decisions of examination boards. Such matters are covered by the regulations for the review of and appeals against the decisions of an examination board.
- 12.8 Complaints in relation to the outcomes of student disciplinary hearings which are covered by the student conduct regulations. Students have a right of appeal against the findings of a disciplinary hearing through a separate procedure.
- 12.9 Complaints against fellow students unless those students are acting as agents or employees of the University or the Students' Union. Such matters can be addressed through the student conduct regulations.
- 12.10 Complaints against the Students' Union in relation to the Students' Union trading activities or its role as a licensee.
- 12.11 Complaints against the Students' Union in relation to the conduct of elections. Such complaints will be addressed by the Academic Registrar in his/her capacity as Returning Officer.

Raising a concern

13. Students have the opportunity to raise concerns without the requirement for submission of a formal complaint. If students wish to raise a concern they should contact their College Student Complaints and Appeals Officer (SCO).

14. The SCO shall acknowledge receipt of the concern and will take reasonable steps to address it by providing information or explanation, suggesting solutions or contacting relevant members of staff. The SCO will keep a record of basic information on the concern such as the Student's name, ID number, course title and a brief summary of the issues raised.
15. The consideration and response to the concern should take no longer than 10 working days.
16. The student will receive a response to the concern they have raised, and they will be directed to submit a Formal Complaint if they are dissatisfied with the response.
17. Raising a concern is an optional stage of the procedure, and students may begin with the submission of a Formal Complaint if they consider this appropriate.
18. Where a student's concerns are considered to be complex, and requiring an investigation beyond the reasonable steps outlined above, a College SCO will consider the issues under the Formal Complaint Process, set out below.
19. The student will be notified of this, and will usually be required to complete a Student Complaint Form, to ensure all the elements they wish to raise are captured and can be considered.

Making a Formal Complaint

Formal Complaint:

20. Students are required to complete a Student Complaint Form and submit it to the designated Student Complaints Officer (SCO), one of whom is located within each college and central service department.
21. The Formal Complaint will be considered by the Dean on behalf of the Head of College/Pro Vice Chancellor.
22. The SCO shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 7 working days.
23. If in the view of the SCO the complaint is vexatious or without substance or merit they shall consult with the University Complaints Unit (UCU) and either:
 - (i) Dismiss the complaint summarily; or,
 - (ii) Refer the complaint for investigation
24. In each instance in 20 above the SCO shall notify the complainant in writing of its decision within 14 working days of making the decision. If the UCU rejects the complaint then the complainant may proceed to Final Complaint Review.

25. Where the SCO believes there are reasonable grounds for investigation the SCO shall refer the complaint to a member of staff that the SCO decides is most appropriate for investigation of the complaint.
26. The investigating member of staff shall investigate the complaint and submit a written report for the consideration of the Dean in consultation with the SCO.
27. The student shall receive a response to their Formal Complaint within 28 working days of its submission.
28. Where an investigation requires interaction with a further process, such as a separate investigation under the University Human Resources procedures, it may be the case that a response will take longer than the standard 28 working days of submission. Should this be the case, the SCO will update the complainant(s), formally pausing the clock on their Student Complaint and clarifying the reasons for that pause.
29. Updates will be provided every 10 working days by the SCO until they are able to release the response to the complainant(s).
30. If the complainant remains dissatisfied they may proceed to Final Complaint Review.

Final Complaint Review:

31. If the complainant wishes to proceed to Final Complaint Review they must write to the Academic Registrar, or nominee, via the University Complaints Unit. The complainant must write to the Academic Registrar, or nominee, within 28 working days of the date of their Formal Complaint Outcome. The student should clearly set out the areas of the Formal Complaint response with which there is dissatisfaction including the reasons why the response is not satisfactory and the desired remedy.
32. The Academic Registrar, or nominee, shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 7 working days. An account of the complaint and the University's response to it to date shall be provided by the college or service area to the Academic Registrar, or his nominee, within 14 working days of a request being submitted.
33. If in the view of the Academic Registrar, or nominee, there has been an unreasonable delay in pursuing the complaint, or the matters being pursued are vexatious or without substance or merit he/she shall reject the complaint summarily, inform the complainant in writing and issue a Completion of Procedures letter within 28 working days from the date of receipt of the request for Final Complaint Review.
34. If in the view of the Academic Registrar, or nominee, the complaint has been considered fairly at the Formal Complaint stage and there is no reason to suggest

that a different decision would be reached upon further consideration, he/she shall terminate the procedures, inform the complainant in writing and issue a Completion of Procedures letter, which shall be sent within 28 working days of receipt of the request for Final Complaint Review.

35. If in the view of the Academic Registrar, or nominee, the complaint warrants further investigation he/she shall refer the complaint to a specially convened Complaints Review Panel.
36. The Complaints Review Panel shall be chaired by a senior member of staff and usually comprise a dean or associate dean, head of service or deputy head of service and a nominated, elected Officer of the Students' Union.
37. The student will be invited to attend the Complaints Review Panel and to bring someone with them for support. This supporting person should be a friend, relative, or representative from the Students' Union Advice Service. The supporting person is not permitted to advocate or represent the student during the discussions.
38. The Academic Registrar shall provide a member of staff to act as secretary to the Panel.
39. The Complaints Review Panel shall be conducted according to the guidance notes.
40. The Complaints Review Panel shall consider the complaint and make its decision within 30 working days of receipt of the request for Final Complaint Review.
41. The Academic Registrar, or nominee, shall inform the complainant of the outcome of the review in writing in the form of a Completion of Procedures letter within 14 working days of the decision by the Panel.
42. Once the University Complaints procedure is complete the complainant has a right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator which must be submitted within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter confirming the University's final decision.
43. If the complaint is related to advice received from Student Services regarding a debt the complainant may submit a complaint to the Financial Ombudsman <http://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/> following completion of the University's internal Complaints procedure.