

# STUDENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Revised November 2017

To be read in conjunction with:

1. Guidelines for Resolution of your Complaint
2. Formal Complaint Form and guidance notes
3. Formal Complaint Stage 1 Review Form

## Student Complaints Procedure

The University is committed to providing high quality education and services to all its students. The University aims to provide a supportive environment for students and to be responsive to student concerns when they are raised. The University views the Student Complaints Procedure as an opportunity to monitor its services and in the provision of feedback. There may be times when students feel that they have not received the high quality of education or level of service that they are reasonably entitled to expect. These problems need addressing to ensure that normal high standards are maintained.

A complaint is broadly defined as:

*“an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about a university’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the university.”*

The complaints process is designed to provide an opportunity for students to make a complaint about the University’s services or staff. The University undertakes to investigate all issues that are raised and deal with them through a process that is fair, consistent, timely and easy to follow.

### 1. General Principles and Aims

- Encourage early and local resolution in as many cases as possible
- Be simple, open and accessible
- Be accountable with clear timescales
- Be non-adversarial
- Be fair to all parties involved and avoid allocating unnecessary blame to individuals
- Lead to prompt resolution
- Lead to service improvement
- No student will be disadvantaged or treated less fairly because he/she has complained

### 2. Scope

2.1 The Student Complaints Procedure applies to complaints from:

- Any current undergraduate or postgraduate student including research students and students studying for a higher or degree apprenticeship;
- Any student on approved leave of absence (for instance, interruption of studies);
- Graduates or former students, provided that the complaint is lodged within three months of completing or formally ceasing their studies.

2.2 The Student Complaints Procedure is not open to:

- Those students who have already pursued the matter as an academic appeal, fitness to practise or as a disciplinary matter or where the police are dealing with the matter until police procedures are complete;
- Those who have applied for admission to the university but who have not yet been accepted and registered;
- Any graduate or former student of the university who fails to lodge a complaint within three months of completing or formally ceasing their studies;

- Postgraduate research students who are complaining about a role as an employee of the University. Complaints about employment should be directed to the University's HR Department.
- 2.3 Students registered for a University award provided by collaborative partner colleges or other organisations who are dissatisfied with the provision at their college should initially pursue their complaint in accordance with the college's complaint procedure. See *Appendix A* for further information.
- 2.4 Students registered on a higher or degree apprenticeship may use this procedure in relation to complaints about the delivery of the academic learning aspects, and related services, of their apprenticeship. See *Appendix B* for further information.
- 2.5 A complaint from a third party other than the student will only be considered if the student is incapacitated for medical reasons or hospitalised or has known mental health issues or a registered disability. This may also be permitted in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Director of Student & Academic Services.
- 2.6 The following situations do not fall within this procedure:
- Complaints about other students. These should in the first instance be directed to the Programme Leader of the complaining student's programme of study. However a student may complain about the University's handling of their complaint against another student or students. The University will not usually look at student-on-student complaints about domestic issues unless this falls into the bullying and harassment procedures.
  - Complaints about bullying or harassment from other students. These can be made using the [Bullying and Harassment at University Policy and Procedure \(Students\)](#).
  - Complaints about marks or results. These should be addressed via the University's [Academic Appeals Procedure \(Taught\)](#) or [Academic Appeals Procedure \(Research\)](#).
- 2.7 In the event of a set of circumstances legitimately giving rise to grounds for both an academic appeal and a formal complaint, the Appeals Investigation Officer and the Complaints Investigation Officer will jointly determine in consultation with the appellant/complainant the manner in which the two matters will be resolved and the appropriate timescales. All parties will ensure that the requirements of the respective procedures are fully adhered to.

### **3. Informal Resolution**

- 3.1 Students must endeavour to resolve a complaint informally before commencing with the Formal Complaints Procedure. Advice on how to approach and resolve the matter informally and directly with the member of staff concerned can be obtained through the contact details provided in the [Guidelines for Resolution of your Complaint](#).
- 3.2 The informal complaint proceedings will be flexible, in accordance with the *General Principles and Aims* above, to facilitate early resolution where appropriate.
- 3.3 It is intended that the informal process should take no longer than a month but there will be occasions when this process has to be extended. All parties will be kept informed of any delays and the reasons for them. No formal complaint will be considered out of time if it immediately follows the result of an informal complaint proceeding.

- 3.4 If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal complaint, they may escalate their complaint to Stage 1 of the Formal Complaint Procedure.

#### **4. Formal Complaint Procedure – Stage 1**

- 4.1 A Formal Complaint must be lodged within 3 months of the date of the incident about which the student is complaining. Any Formal Complaint received after this deadline will be deemed out of time for consideration and the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter including details of the OIA Scheme (see Section 10).

- 4.2 The complaint must be lodged using the [Formal Complaint Form](#). This must be handed in or posted to a Campus Student Centre where an automated receipt will be issued. Only complaints lodged via this route will be accepted. Assistance with this form can be obtained from the Students' Union Advisors (see Section 11) or a Listening Ear or any member of staff.

Letters sent to the address given on the complaint form will be assumed to have been received. The student must summarise the complaint in no more than 500 words and state what they desire to happen as the outcome of the complaint. Pertinent evidence may be attached in support of the complaint.

- 4.3 The Head of Academic Registry will acknowledge receipt of the Formal Complaint in writing and appoint an Investigating Officer [the 'Officer'] to undertake the initial consideration of the Formal Complaint. The Investigating Officer will have had no previous involvement with the complaint at the informal stage.
- 4.4 The Officer will identify and act upon those complaints which may require a particularly swift response, for instance in the case of provision for a declared disability or where the known mental health of the student could be exacerbated by delays.
- 4.5 The Officer will send a copy of the Formal Complaint Form and any accompanying documentation to the relevant Faculty or Directorate, which will co-ordinate the response and reply to the Officer within 15 working days. This may take longer outside of the academic session, any delays will be notified to the student with reasons for the delay.
- 4.6 The Officer may request to interview the student. If an interview does take place, a record of the interview will be made and form part of the complaint file.
- 4.7 The University reserves the right to refer complaints at any stage to an alternative means of resolution, including to a mediation process, if it is considered to be in the best interests of the timely and effective resolution of the complaint.
- 4.8 Exceptionally, with the agreement of the student and staff concerned, complaints may be referred to one of the formal stages in the process omitting earlier informal or formal stages, if it is considered to be in the best interests of the timely and effective resolution of the complaint.
- 4.9 Any member of staff referred to in the Formal Complaint Form will be entitled to see information relating to them in order that they may respond to the nominated person in the faculty or office. Staff named in a complaint will be sent a copy of the complaint by the Officer. Staff needing support and advice when mentioned in a complaint may consult with their line manager or the Listening Ear network or their trade union.

- 4.10 All information submitted in relation to the complaint will be dealt with confidentially and only disclosed to those parties involved in the investigation of the complaint, or as necessary to progress the complaint, or as required by law.
- 4.11 The student should expect a written response to their complaint within 20 working days from the date of acknowledgment. Any delays will be notified to the student in writing with reasons for the delay.
- 4.12 The response will explain the outcome of the complaint in the following terms: founded, partially founded or unfounded.

In the case of founded and partially founded complaints, the response will detail what action the university proposes to take to correct the situation. Where the outcome is unfounded, an explanation will be given as to why there are no grounds to take the matter further and that no action will be taken.

- 4.13 The student will be invited to respond in writing to the outcome of the investigation into the Formal Complaint.

If the student is satisfied with the outcome, the complaint is deemed to be resolved.

If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint and is able to demonstrate grounds for their dissatisfaction, the case will be referred to Stage 2 of the Formal Complaint Procedure. This must be done within 10 working days of the date of the outcome letter.

If no reply is received from the student within 10 working days of the date of the outcome letter, it will be presumed that the student does not wish to pursue the complaint and no further action will be taken.

## **5. Formal Complaint Procedure – Stage 2**

- 5.1 Students may request a review of a Stage 1 complaint decision providing they can demonstrate one or more of the following grounds:
  - a) There is new evidence that would have significantly affected the outcome and could not reasonably have been made available when the complaint was made;
  - b) That there is evidence that all of the relevant information was not considered at Stage 1;
  - c) That the decision is unreasonable given the facts of the case;
  - d) That the complaint was upheld but the proposed remedy is inappropriate.
- 5.2 In order to utilise Stage 2 of the Formal Complaint Procedure, the student must complete the [Formal Complaint Stage 1 Review Form](#). The completed form together with any written evidence should be sent to the Academic Registry Office within 15 working days of the date of the Stage 1 outcome letter, clearly outlining the reasons for taking matters to Stage 2. The Head of Academic Registry will acknowledge receipt of the Stage 1 Review Form.
- 5.3 Within 15 working days of receipt of the Formal Complaint Stage 1 Review Form, the Head of Academic Registry will review the complaint and the associated evidence. Further evidence may be requested at this stage.

The outcome of the review will find either:

- a) That there are no grounds for taking the matter further. If this is the case, the Head of Academic Registry will inform the student in writing. The student will be informed of their right to request a final review of the outcome of the complaint procedure under the *Final Review Procedure* (see Section 7); or
- b) That there are grounds for consideration and further investigation. If this is the case, an independent University Complaints Committee will be convened to hear the complaint.

## 6. The University Complaints Committee

6.1 The University Complaints Committee [the 'Committee'] will include the following membership:

- Deputy Vice Chancellor or nominee (Chair)
- A member of the Student Experience Committee from a non-related faculty or office, or a senior representative from a non-related faculty or office
- A Students' Union Sabbatical Officer or nominee

Full membership must be present for a quorum to be established.

6.2 No one will sit on the Committee who has had prior involvement with the case and no member of the Committee should work within the Faculty in which the student's programme of study resides. No member will have had any previous involvement with the student in matters directly relating to the complaint.

6.3 A Secretary will be appointed by Student & Academic Services to service the Committee. The Secretary is not a member but will be present throughout proceedings to advise on regulatory and procedural matters and take an accurate record of the meeting.

6.4 The student will be given a minimum notice period of 10 working days of the date, time and place of the meeting. The notice of the meeting will be accompanied by copies of all documentation to be used in consideration of the complaint. The student will receive a copy of this documentation with the proviso that the University may withhold certain documentation where disclosure is likely to prejudice the conduct of the University's business or endanger staff or students.

6.5 The student may be accompanied by a friend or parent or someone from the Students' Union, who may speak for them.

A student who intends to be accompanied must inform the Secretary of the name of the person accompanying them in writing in advance of the meeting. The accompanying person may not be a practicing solicitor or barrister.

6.6 The student may call witnesses to speak on their behalf, the details of which must be provided to the Secretary before the meeting.

6.7 A representative of the Faculty or Directorate may give evidence and the panel may request attendance from specific members of staff.

6.8 The Committee may request supplementary information from either the Faculty/ Directorate or the student within a given deadline before reaching a decision. The student and Faculty/Directorate will be advised of this decision in writing. On consideration of such supplementary information, the committee will determine its final decision within 15 working days of the receipt of the supplementary information.

- 6.9 The student and any member of staff complained against will have the outcome conveyed to them in writing.
- 6.10 The student will be notified in writing within 10 working days of the decision of the Committee. This will include the reasons for their decision. If the complaint is deemed founded or partially founded the panel will recommend suitable redress. The complainant will be informed of their right to request a final review of the outcome of the complaint procedure under the Final Review Procedure (see Section 7).
- 6.11 Should a complaint be founded or partially founded, the Chair of the University Complaints Committee may make recommendations about practice to the relevant Faculty or Directorate.

## **7. Final Review Procedure**

- 7.1. Students may be issued with a formal outcome to their complaint at specified stages of this procedure. Where a student has received a formal outcome, a final review of that outcome may be requested in accordance with the University's [Final Review Procedure](#).
- 7.2. Requests for a final review must be made in writing to the Director of Student Affairs within 15 working days from the date of notification of the formal outcome imposed on the [Request for Final Review Form](#). Requests for a final review received later than this will not normally be considered.

## **8. Reporting, Monitoring and Review**

- 8.1 The Academic Registry will maintain a database of student complaints for each academic session and provide an annual report to the University Student Experience Committee. It will be the responsibility of the Student Experience Committee to monitor the data and make recommendations to Faculty Boards as appropriate.
- 8.2 It will be the responsibility of the Academic Registry to review the Student Complaints Procedure and its effectiveness and to make recommendations for changes, where appropriate, to be considered by the Student Experience Committee.

## **9. Accommodation Complaints**

Any Completion of Procedures letter relating to a formal complaint about an accommodation issue will contain details of the ANUK Scheme as well as that of the OIA.

## **10. Independent Adjudication**

Students who have been issued with a Completion of Procedures letter may be able to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) if they remain dissatisfied with a final decision of the University providing that their complaint is eligible under its Rules, which are available on the OIA website at <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>. Students will need to send to the OIA a Scheme Application Form within **twelve months** of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. A Scheme Application Form can be downloaded from the OIA website.

Students studying for a higher or degree apprenticeship can request the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to review whether the degree apprenticeship provider has properly investigated their original complaint in line with its procedures. Complaints about providers should be sent to: [complaints.esfa@education.gov.uk](mailto:complaints.esfa@education.gov.uk) or via: The Complaints Team, Education and Skills Funding Agency, Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT

## 11. Advice and Support

Free independent advice and advocacy is available from the University of Greenwich Students' Union and GK Unions Advice Service.

The University of Greenwich Students' Union:

Advice line: 020 8331 8267

Email: [suugadvice@gre.ac.uk](mailto:suugadvice@gre.ac.uk)

Web: [www.suug.co.uk/advice](http://www.suug.co.uk/advice)

Medway-based students can contact the GK Unions Advice Service:

Advice line: 01634 88 88 82

Email: [advice@gkunions.co.uk](mailto:advice@gkunions.co.uk)

Web: [www.gkunions.co.uk/advice](http://www.gkunions.co.uk/advice)

## APPENDIX A

### **Information for students registered for a University award provided by collaborative partner colleges or other organisations (the ‘delivery provider’)**

Complaints about service-related issues (such as IT or crèche facilities) provided by the delivery provider must be pursued through the delivery provider’s complaints procedure. The delivery provider should be responsible for conducting the formal and review stages of the complaints process for this type of complaint. UK Partner Colleges that are members of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) scheme will issue a Completion of Procedures Letter at the end of that process.

Complaints about the provision of academic-related matters (other than issues which fall under the remit of an academic appeal) should still be considered initially through the delivery provider’s complaints procedure. If students remain dissatisfied with the outcome once they have exhausted all stages of the delivery provider’s complaints procedure, they may request a final review of the outcome under the University’s *Final Review Procedure* within 15 working days of the delivery provider’s final response. Further details of how to request a final review can be found in the [Final Review Procedure](#) available on the student portal.

Information on how to access the delivery provider’s complaints procedure will be set out in the programme handbook.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Information for students registered on a higher or apprenticeship degree apprenticeship**

Students registered on a higher or degree apprenticeship may use this procedure in relation to complaints about the delivery of the academic learning aspects of their apprenticeship.

Complaints about the practical learning aspects provided by the employer to the apprentice should use the complaints procedures of the employer.

The University and the employer will notify the other party to provide them with full details of the complaint and to determine the most appropriate procedure for resolving the issues identified. Both parties will work together in good faith to try to resolve any complaint as quickly as possible within the remit of the procedure being followed.

If students remain dissatisfied with the outcome once they have exhausted all stages of the complaints procedure, they can request the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to review whether the degree apprenticeship provider has properly investigated their original complaint in line with its procedures (see Section 10 of this document).