

# STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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The complaints procedure outlines the process should students wish to make a complaint about the university's services or staff.	

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## Purpose of the procedure

We are committed to providing high quality education and services to all our students. However, we recognise that there may be times when you feel that you have not received the high quality of education or level of service that you are reasonably entitled to expect.

We aim to provide a supportive environment for you, and to be responsive to your concerns when they are raised. We view the Student Complaints Procedure as an opportunity to monitor and make improvements to our services.

## What is a complaint?

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 you to make a complaint about the University’s services or staff. We undertake to investigate all issues that are raised and deal with them through a process that is fair, consistent, timely and easy to follow.

## Overview of the Student Complaints Procedure

There are 3 Levels to the complaints procedure;

Level 0: Informal Resolution (local level) - you must start your complaint at Level 0

Level 1: Formal consideration at Faculty/Directorate level

Level 2: Formal review by the Stage 2 Review Panel

After the internal University processes have been exhausted, you will have the opportunity to have your complaint independently reviewed by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

### 1. General Principles

- 1.1 We encourage early and local resolution wherever possible by operating a complaints process that is simple, open and accessible.
- 1.2 A group of students may use this procedure to make a collective complaint, provided that one of you identifies yourself as the main contact for purposes of communication.
- 1.2 We recognise that making a complaint can be stressful. You are therefore advised to seek advice and support before making a complaint from Student & Academic Services or from the Students’ Union Advice and Support Centre (see section 12).
- 1.3 As far as possible, matters raised as a complaint will remain confidential to those directly involved in investigating the complaint, providing a response to it and communicating with you, unless there is a serious risk of harm to any parties. However, in the interests of natural justice, parties to a complaint have the right to know the full details of the complaint or, in exceptional circumstances, only those details which need to be shared to enable a proper response to be made.
- 1.4 Where a complaint of harassment and bullying is made by you against a member of staff, the complaint may be referred for consideration under the [Bullying and Harassment Policy & Procedure \(Students\)](#).

- 1.5 In order to ensure that a thorough investigation of a complaint is made, we expect to be able to collect appropriate information from all the parties involved. Anonymous complaints cannot therefore be accepted.
- 1.6 Those investigating or adjudicating upon a complaint at any stage of the procedure will do so impartially. Anyone with a material personal interest in the complaint will neither investigate nor adjudicate.
- 1.7 Where a shortcoming in provision or process is acknowledged, a complaint may be addressed by offering an apology or an acceptable explanation for the deficiency, by undertaking to implement future improvement, or by a mutually acceptable course of action to address the individual circumstances of the case.
- 1.8 You will not be disadvantaged as a result of raising a matter of concern or of making a complaint, provided it is made in good faith. Where a complaint is shown to be vexatious, the complaint will be rejected and disciplinary action may be taken.
- 1.9 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 you 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.

## **2. Timescales for consideration of complaints**

- 2.1 All timescales referred to in this document are measured in 'calendar days' which means every day of the week including Saturdays and Sundays, except for university closure days such as public holidays and Christmas closures. Full details of term dates and university closures can be found here <https://docs.gre.ac.uk/rep/sas/term-dates>
- 2.2 Expected timescales for the consideration of complaints at the informal stage are detailed in Section 6.
- 2.3 We aim to resolve complaints within 90 calendar days from the date of submission of the Formal Complaint form identified in section 7 to the formal complaint outcome. Specific timelines for individual stages of the procedure are detailed within the relevant sections.
- 2.4 If you intend to submit evidence subsequent to submission of your complaint, the time between submission of the complaint and receipt of the evidence will not be counted towards the 90-day resolution time.
- 2.5 In some cases it can be necessary to exceed the 90-day resolution time, for example where:
  - The complexities of the case warrant extended scrutiny.
  - An appeal is being considered simultaneously and it is considered in your best interests to await the outcome of the appeal before resolving the complaint.
  - Your complaint is submitted just prior to the Christmas holiday period when the University is closed.
- 2.6 All instances of delay at any stage of the procedure will be communicated to you in writing with an explanation for the reasons for the delay.

### 3. Who does this procedure apply to?

3.1 You can submit a complaint if:

- You are a currently registered on a taught or postgraduate research programme
- You are currently registered on a higher or degree apprenticeship;
- You are on an approved leave of absence (for instance, interruption of studies);
- You are a graduate or former student, provided that your complaint is lodged within three months of completing or formally ceasing your studies.

3.2 You cannot submit a complaint if:

- The matter has already been considered 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;
- You have applied for admission to the university but have not yet been accepted and registered;
- You are a graduate or former student but failed to lodge a complaint within three months of completing or formally ceasing your studies;
- You are a postgraduate research student student complaining about a role as an employee of the University. Complaints about employment should be directed to the University's HR Department.

3.3 If you are registered for a University award provided by a collaborative partner college or other organisation and are dissatisfied with the provision at your college, you should initially pursue your complaint in accordance with the college's complaint procedure. See *Appendix A* for further information.

3.4 If you are registered on a higher or degree apprenticeship you may use this procedure in relation to complaints about the delivery of the academic learning aspects, and related services, of your apprenticeship. See *Appendix B* for further information.

3.5 A complaint from a third party other than you will only be considered if you are incapacitated for medical reasons or hospitalised or have a 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.

### 4. What does the procedure cover?

Complaints against any academic or non-academic service provided by the University, including but not limited to:

- Failure to meet obligations including those outlined in module/student handbooks
- Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the University
- Concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching, supervision or administration
- Poor quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided by the us
- Complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing a service on our behalf

### 5. What issues cannot be considered under this policy?

- Complaints about other students. These should in the first instance be directed to your Programme Leader, which may lead to consideration under the Student Disciplinary Procedure. However you may complain about our handling of your complaint against another student or students.

- Complaints about bullying or harassment from other students. These can be made using the [Bullying and Harassment at University Policy and Procedure \(You\)](#).
- Complaints about results. These should be addressed via the University's [Academic Appeals Procedure \(Taught\)](#) or [Academic Appeals Procedure \(Research\)](#).
- Complaints about the Greenwich Students' Union, which has its own [policy and procedures](#)
- Complaints relating to applications to the University, which are considered under the [Admissions Policy and Procedure](#).

## 6. Stage 0 - Informal resolution

- 6.1 You 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](#).
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal resolution, you may escalate your complaint to Stage 1 of the procedure.

## 7. Stage 1 - Formal resolution

- 7.1 A Formal Complaint must be lodged within 3 months of the date of the incident about which you are complaining. Any Formal Complaint received after this deadline will usually be deemed out of time for consideration and you will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter including details of the OIA Scheme (see Section 10).
- 7.2 Your complaint must be lodged using the [Formal Complaint Form](#) by email to [formalcomplaints@gre.ac.uk](mailto:formalcomplaints@gre.ac.uk). The Academic Registry casework team will acknowledge receipt of the Formal Complaint. Only complaints lodged via this route will be accepted. Assistance with this form can be obtained from the Students' Union advisors (see Section 12) or a Listening Ear or any member of staff.
- 7.3 The Academic Registry casework team will administer the complaint and be available to you and staff at all stages of the process.
- 7.4 The Academic Registry casework team will send a copy of the Formal Complaint Form and any accompanying documentation to a senior member of staff in the relevant Faculty or Directorate, who will act as the Investigating Officer to undertake the initial consideration of the Formal Complaint.
- 7.5 The Investigating 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 you could be exacerbated by delays.
- 7.6 The Investigating Officer may request to interview you and/or other parties named in the complaint. Should the Investigating Officer wish to meet with you, they will contact you to arrange an appropriate date to meet. You will be offered the opportunity to bring a supporter to this meeting. A record of any interviews that take place will form part of the complaint file.

- 7.7 Exceptionally, with the agreement of all parties, complaints may be referred to one of the formal stages in the process omitting earlier stages, if it is considered to be in the best interests of the timely and effective resolution of the complaint.
- 7.8 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 Investigating Officer. Staff named in a complaint will be sent a copy of the complaint, and may seek support and advice from their line manager, the Listening Ear network or their trade union.
- 7.9 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.
- 7.10 You should expect a written response to your complaint within 28 calendar days from the date of acknowledgment. Any delays will be notified to you in writing with reasons for the delay.
- 7.11 The response will explain the outcome of the complaint in the following terms: upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

In the case of upheld and partially upheld complaints, the response will detail what resolution the university is offering to correct the situation. Where the outcome is not upheld, an explanation will be provided.

- 7.12 You will be invited to respond in writing to the outcome of the investigation into the Formal Complaint.

If you are satisfied with the resolution offered, the complaint is deemed to be resolved.

If you are not satisfied with the resolution offered and are able to demonstrate grounds for your dissatisfaction, you may request a review of the Stage 1 outcome using Stage 2 of the procedure. This must be done within 14 calendar days from the date of notification of the outcome.

If no reply is received from you within 14 calendar days from the date of notification of the outcome, it will be presumed that you do not wish to pursue the complaint and no further action will be taken.

## **8. Stage 2 – Review**

- 8.1 You may request a review of a Stage 1 complaint outcome providing you 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) There is evidence that not all of the relevant information was 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.
- 8.2 The request for review must be lodged within 14 calendar days of the outcome notification from Stage 1 using the [Stage 1 Outcome Review Form](#). The completed form should be accompanied by any relevant evidence and sent by email to [formalcomplaints@gre.ac.uk](mailto:formalcomplaints@gre.ac.uk). Only requests for review lodged via this route will be accepted.

- 8.3 The Academic Registry casework team will acknowledge receipt of the Stage 1 Outcome Review Form and pass to the Head of Academic Registry (or nominee) to consider the review request and associated evidence. Further evidence may be requested at this stage.
- 8.4 Following the initial consideration, you will be advised that either:
- a) There are no grounds for taking the matter further. You will be informed of the outcome and issued with a Completion of Procedures letter including details of the OIA Scheme (see Section 10); or
  - b) There are grounds for further investigation. If this is the case, a Stage 2 Review Panel will be convened to undertake a final review of your complaint.

## 9. Stage 2 Review Panel

- 9.1 The Stage 2 Review Panel [the 'Panel'] will comprise the following membership:
- Deputy Vice Chancellor or nominee (Chair)
  - A member of the Student Experience Committee or a senior member of staff from a non-related faculty or directorate
  - A representative from the Students' Union
- 9.2 No one will sit on the Panel who has had prior involvement with the case and no member of the Panel should work within the Faculty in which your programme of study resides.
- 9.3 A Secretary will be appointed by Student & Academic Services to service the Panel. 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.
- 9.4 You will be given a minimum notice period of 14 calendar days of the date, time and manner<sup>1</sup> of the meeting. The notice of the meeting will be accompanied by copies of all documentation to be used in consideration of your review request, 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 you.
- 9.5 You have the right to be heard in person by the Panel, and will usually be expected to present your own case.
- 9.6 You may be accompanied by a friend or supporter of your choice or a representative of the Students' Union. You must inform the Secretary of the name of the person accompanying you in writing in advance of the meeting.
- 9.7 You may invite witnesses in support of your case providing that you have informed the Secretary at least 5 calendar days in advance of the meeting.
- 9.8 A representative of the Faculty or Directorate will be invited to attend to respond to issues raised in the review request.
- 9.9 The Panel may request supplementary information from you or the Faculty/ Directorate within a given deadline before reaching a decision. All parties will be advised of this decision in writing. On consideration of such supplementary information, the Panel will determine its final decision within 21 calendar days of the receipt of the supplementary information.
- 9.10 You will be notified in writing within 14 calendar days of the decision of the Panel.

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<sup>1</sup> The meeting will take place by the most appropriate method, either on campus or via video conference.



This will include the reasons for their decision. If the complaint is deemed upheld or partially upheld, the Panel will consider and recommend suitable redress.

- 9.11 Any member of staff complained against will also receive a copy of the outcome.
- 9.12 This marks the end of the University's consideration of the complaint. You will be informed of the outcome and issued with a Completion of Procedures letter including details of the OIA Scheme (see Section 10)

## 10. Independent Adjudication

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint process you may be able to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) providing that your complaint is eligible under its Rules, which are available on the OIA website at <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>. You 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.

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.

If you are studying for a higher or degree apprenticeship, you can request the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to review whether the degree apprenticeship provider has properly investigated your 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 Reporting, Monitoring and Review

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 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.

## 12 Advice and Support

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

Greenwich Students' Union:

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

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

Online contact form: [www.greenwichsu.co.uk/advice/triageform](http://www.greenwichsu.co.uk/advice/triageform)

For students at Medway, please visit: [www.greenwichsu.co.uk/medway/advice](http://www.greenwichsu.co.uk/medway/advice)

## APPENDIX A

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

1. 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.

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

2. Complaints about the academic quality<sup>2</sup> or academic standards<sup>3</sup> of the programme or its delivery (other than issues which fall under the remit of an academic appeal) should still be considered initially through your delivery provider's complaints procedure.

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome once you have exhausted all stages of your delivery provider's complaints procedure, you may request a final review of the outcome under the University's *Final Review Procedure* within 21 calendar 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.

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<sup>2</sup> **Academic quality** is concerned with how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them.

<sup>3</sup> **Academic standards** are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of its academic credit or qualifications. Individual degree-awarding bodies are responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining the grading/marketing schemes and any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above and below the threshold academic standards.

## **APPENDIX B**

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

If you are registered on a higher or degree apprenticeship then you may use this procedure in relation to complaints about the delivery of the academic learning aspects of your apprenticeship.

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

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

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