

Student complaints procedure

Two circumstances need to be distinguished, one from the other. First, a student may be dissatisfied with some formal process which has culminated in a decision, for example, following disciplinary procedures, examination offences or irregularities, decisions by examination boards and the like. Second, a student may have a complaint against the University relating to the delivery of teaching in some way or other or which may refer to other aspects of the student's relationship with the University. It is convenient to refer to the first as 'Student Appeals' and to the second as 'Student Complaints'. The following procedure applies to Student Complaints. As regards Student Appeals, the University has in place appropriate internal mechanisms for appeals to be heard against disciplinary, academic or other decisions; information is given in appropriate Handbooks and is available on request from the Director of Student Services. A student who is uncertain as to whether Complaints or Appeal procedures apply to any particular case should consult the Director of Student Services.

Advice on matters relating to Appeals and Complaints may also be had from the Students' Union.

Procedures

General

- (a) 'Designated person' means any person authorised to consider a complaint under these procedures and 'committee' means the Complaints Committee.
- (b) This complaints procedure is not a disciplinary procedure although an upheld complaint may give rise to such a procedure. In addition, an upheld complaint may result, where appropriate, in an adjustment to a previous decision relating to a student's academic progress or award, or action by the University against a member of staff.
- (c) The designated person or committee considering a complaint under any stage of the procedure may decline to settle the complaint while it, or any matters which in the judgement of the designated person or the committee are intrinsic to it, is the subject of disciplinary or other formal procedures within the University.
- (d) In any interview of the complainant at any stage he or she shall have the right to be accompanied by a friend who, unless otherwise agreed by the designated person or committee, shall be one of a member of the Academic Staff of the University, a currently registered student, a Sabbatical Officer of the Students' Union or a Student Advisor within the Students' Union.
- (e) Any student who makes a complaint in good faith will not be adversely affected by the fact of the complaint whether or not it is upheld.
- (f) In the case of a complaint relating to a designated person the complaint shall immediately be referred to the next stage of the procedure.

- (g) A complainant, the designated person and the committee are expected at all stages to have appropriate regard to confidentiality.
- (h) Reference to 'student' in this procedure includes any group of students with a common complaint.
- (i) A complaint made anonymously will only be considered under exceptional circumstances and where the nature of the complaint makes an investigation appropriate.
- (j) Complainants wishing to invoke the Procedure should do so within a reasonable period of the occurrence being recognised and not normally after the elapse of more than six months.
- (k) At any stage of the procedure a complaint should be dealt with as speedily as possible consistent with the need to ensure satisfactory consideration of the complaint and an appropriate attempt at resolution.
- (l) Any student wishing to raise a complaint is advised to consult the Students' Union at an early stage.
- (m) If, in the view of the Director of Student Services or a Pro-Vice-Chancellor the complaint raised is without foundation or not susceptible to resolution using the complaints procedure, the procedure may be stopped and the complainant may be issued with a "Completion of Procedures" letter to enable him or her to take the case immediately to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

Stage 1

A student who has any complaint arising from his or her relationship with the University which is not appropriately dealt with under other procedures e.g. the Code of Practice on Research Students, should in the first instance raise the matter with the person responsible for the area within which the complaint arises. In the majority of cases this will be the Head of School or equivalent. At this stage, it is good practice to ascertain the remedy which the student is seeking.

Stage 2

Where the complaint has not been resolved under Stage 1 above a formal complaint should be lodged with the Director of Student Services who will consult as appropriate with a view to resolving the issue. In the event of resolution not being achieved, the Director of Student Services shall submit a report to a Pro-Vice-Chancellor. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor may make such further investigations or enquiries, if any, as he or she deems necessary and then come to a conclusion in the matter.

Stage 3

If, exceptionally, Stage 2 does not result in the issue of a "Completion of Procedures" letter, the complainant or a designated person may request that the University Secretary convene a Complaints Committee. The decision of the Complaints Committee, which shall be reported to the Council, shall be final. Where appropriate the Complaints Committee may make a recommendation as to remedy. The complainant shall receive a statement, with reasons, of the Committee's decision.

The following arrangements shall apply in respect of a Complaints Committee

- (a) A meeting of the Committee shall be convened as soon as practicable after reference to the Committee.
- (b) The complainant shall be invited to make a written submission to the Committee and/or to appear before the Committee in person. If appearing before the Committee he or she may be accompanied by a friend who, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee, shall be a member of the Academic Staff of the University, a currently registered student, a Sabbatical Officer of the Students' Union or a Student Advisor within the Students' Union.
- (c) Exceptionally, the Committee may seek such further information as it deems appropriate, either orally or in writing, from other members of the University. However, it is the expectation that further material will neither be sought nor considered.
- (d) Save as provided above the Committee shall determine its own procedures.