

## COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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This procedure should be read in conjunction with the Complaints Policy.

### **1 Step 1 – Early resolution**

- 1.1 In the first instance, all complaints should be discussed with the relevant member of staff directly concerned. If the complaint relates to an aspect of a student's course and the student does not feel comfortable approaching the person most directly concerned, they should speak to the Head of Subject or course co-ordinator or personal tutor, or for students studying on-line, their on-line adviser.
- 1.2 Timescale: Step 1 must be invoked within eight (8) weeks of the incident that is the cause for complaint.

### **2 Step 2 – Formal stage**

- 2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved through informal discussion, it should be submitted on a Student Complaints Form to Quality Assurance & Enhancement (QAE), who will direct it to the most appropriate member of staff, for example, the manager of the service or the Director of the academic department, for a response.
- 2.2 The Student Complaints Form should include as much information as possible, in particular, the following:
  - full details of the cause for the complaint, including its impact;
  - the action the student has taken thus far and the date(s) of that action;
  - the response they have received;
  - the reason for their dissatisfaction or disagreement with that response;
  - the remedy that they are seeking.

All sections of the Complaints Form should be completed. If it is not possible to complete a particular section, the reason for this should be noted on the form. Students must also enclose copies of any relevant evidence.

Students should be aware that where there is no evidence of early resolution having been sought, or where there are no compelling reasons as to why early resolution was not possible and/or appropriate, the complaint may be referred back to Step 1 of this procedure. Where this is deemed to be the case, the student will be notified of the decision in writing.

Where the complaint is under consideration at Step 2, the case will be referred to a senior member of staff for investigation. Where possible, this person will be someone who has had no previous involvement in the matter. Where a complaint is made about QAE the case will be referred to a member of staff from another team.

- 2.3 Where a complaint involves alleged misconduct on the part of a staff member, it will be referred to the Head of Employee Relations and Business Partnering by QAE so that they may determine whether any immediate action is required under the University's Disciplinary Policy for Staff. In some instances it may be necessary to make this referral at Step 1, for example, when the allegation is considered to be serious, but the student does not wish to put their complaint in writing.
- 2.4 Students should normally receive a written acknowledgement within five (5) working days. Whilst it is anticipated that the investigation will be completed and a written response sent within twenty (20) working days, this period may need to be extended in University vacations and/or depending on the nature and complexity of the complaint.
- 2.5 Timescale: Step 2 must be invoked within ten (10) working days of the completion of Step 1.

### **3 Step 3 – Review**

- 3.1 A student may request a review of the procedure undertaken at Step 2 should they so wish. The grounds for requesting such a review are:
- a material irregularity in the conduct of Step 2 of the Complaints Procedure; or
  - where material new evidence has become available since the commencement of Step 2, which the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process.

Students should make their request for a review by completing a Review Request Form, to be submitted to Quality Assurance & Enhancement.

- 3.2 A student can expect to receive an acknowledgement of receipt of the request within five (5) working days. It is normally expected that the review will be completed and a response sent within twenty (20) working days. However, this period may need to be extended in University vacations and/or depending on the nature and complexity of the review required.
- 3.3 Timescale: Step 3 must be invoked within ten (10) working days of the completion of Step 2.

### **4 Completion of Procedures Letter**

- 4.1 The response from Quality Assurance & Enhancement following the completion of Step 3 will be the conclusion of the University's internal processes and the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter.

### **5 Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)**

- 5.1 If, after using the complaints procedure, the student feels the University's response is not satisfactory, they can refer the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), following receipt of a Completion of Procedures letter. Prospective students and applicants should be aware that they are not able to have recourse to the OIA under their rules.

- 5.2 The OIA provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. Anyone who was or is registered as a student can complain about any or all of the following:
- a) a course of study for which they were registered;
  - b) a service provided to them by the University; and
  - c) a final decision by the University's disciplinary or appeal body.
- 5.3 Students must first follow all of the University's internal complaints procedures (described above) before submitting any complaint to the OIA. Once they have exhausted these procedures, the University will issue a "Completion of Procedures" letter. Students must apply to the OIA within twelve (12) months of the issue of this letter.
- 5.4 Further details can be found on the OIA website at [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk). The OIA's contact details are: Office of the Independent Adjudicator, Second Floor, Abbey Gate, 57 – 75 Kings Road, Reading RG1 3AB, Tel: 0118 959 9813 Email: [enquiries@oiahe.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@oiahe.org.uk).