

PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING STUDENT COMPLAINTS

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Students of the University of Chichester may on occasion feel dissatisfied with the quality of a service that is provided. The University seeks to provide a framework for the resolution of these complaints which ensures that complaints are:
- (i) treated seriously and dealt with speedily and fairly;
 - (ii) resolved as close as possible to their point of origin with a minimum of formality;
 - (iii) progressed through two stages where necessary, an informal and a formal, and resolved at the informal stage wherever possible;
 - (iv) dealt with in a way that respects privacy and confidentiality;
 - (v) resolved without prejudice to the complainant.
- 1.2 For the purposes of these procedures a complaint is defined as any concern about the provision of a programme of study or a related service by the University.
- 1.3 The complaint must be made within 42 calendar days (six weeks) from its cause.
- 1.4 The University's Admissions Policy provides for complaints about the admissions process or an admissions decision.
- 1.5 The University's Postgraduate Research Students' Handbook provides for complaints about a research programme.
- 1.6 These procedures can be invoked in cases where a student wishes to complain about the actions of another student and where the Harassment Procedures (Appendix 7 of these regulations) do not apply. In such cases, however, it is expected that the Complaints Procedure, detailed here, will be used for the sole purpose of triggering the Disciplinary Procedures or resolving the matter at the informal stage.
- 1.7 Students cannot use this procedure to pursue matters related to the outcomes of academic assessment. A separate appeals procedure is detailed in the University Regulations sections 11.5 and 11.6.
- 1.8 Whenever a student is interviewed in relation to a complaint they are entitled to be accompanied by a friend. 'Friend' may include a representative from the Students' Union, other personal friend or family member, but excludes any form of legal representation.
- 1.9 These procedures are operated without prejudice to a student's right to pursue legal remedies outside the University.
- 1.10 No complaint can be made anonymously, but students who make complaints through this procedure can do so without fear of disadvantage or recrimination.
- 1.11 A very few complaints may be found to be vexatious, where a complaint is pursued over time with little prospect of resolution. This may involve making serial complaints about different matters or continuing to raise the same, or similar, matters over again. The University may terminate complaints that are considered vexatious after a reasonable attempt has been made at resolution.
- 1.12 It is expected that trivial or frivolous complaints will be dealt with under 2.1 **Pre-procedures** below and will not proceed to the formal stage. A trivial or frivolous complaint which proceeds to the formal Stage One may be rejected as not requiring serious investigation.

2. Procedures

2.1 Pre-Procedures

2.1.1 Where a student has a complaint about a programme of study or a service provided by the University he or she should discuss the matter with the member of staff associated with the matter in question. Students may seek advice or assistance from the Students' Union or from the Director of Student and Academic Services, particularly if they are unsure how to complain, if they are unsure who to complain to, or need help in making their complaint. It is the aspiration of the University that most complaints will be dealt with to the student's satisfaction at this stage.

2.2 Formal Stage One

2.2.1 If action under the informal part of the procedure does not successfully resolve the difficulty, the complainant should write a clear and concise letter, setting out the grounds for the complaint. This should contain all relevant details including contact details and why the complainant believes the informal stage provided no redress in this case. This should be directed at the relevant Complaints Officer as follows:

Executive Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered - complaints about matters relating to a programme of study

Director of Student and Academic Services - complaints:

- about services provided by the Academic Registry, the Academic Quality and Standards Unit, the Centre for Collaborative Programmes or Student Support Services;
- that do not immediately fit any of the categories in this list

Head of Library Services – complaints about learning resources

Director of IT Services – complaints about IT services

Director of Business Services - complaints about residences and catering

Director of Estates and Facilities Management – complaints about maintenance of premises, car parking¹, cleaning, security or contractors working on University premises

Director of HR – complaints about health and safety

Deputy Chief Financial Officer- complaints about finance

President of the Students' Union - complaints about the Student Union;

The Complaints Officer will:

2.2.1.1 write to the complainant acknowledging the complaint, within five working days of its receipt;

2.2.1.2 inform the relevant member of the Vice-Chancellor's Group (if the recipient is not a member of the VCG);

2.2.1.3 investigate the complaint, or nominate an appropriate member of the Senior Managers' Forum or a Subject Leader to investigate - the complainant will be interviewed, together with any other interested party, if it is deemed necessary;

2.2.1.4 respond to the complainant in writing, normally within 14 calendar days of receipt of the complaint - this letter will detail the outcome of any investigation of the complaint, the conclusion reached and explain the action taken (if any) to redress the position;

2.2.1.5 maintain a record of all complaints.

2.2.2 Complaints about the operation of Boards of Examiners will proceed directly to Stage Two.

2.3 Stage Two: Appeal against a Stage One decision

2.3.1 If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage One of the procedure he or she may appeal in writing to the appropriate member of the Vice-Chancellor's Group within 14 calendar days of receiving the outcome of Stage One. That will normally be:

¹ Parking on campus is managed by contractors on behalf of the University and the Parking Regulations set out the procedure for appeal to the contractors against a Charge Penalty Notice

The Executive Dean of the Faculty where the complaint relates to an academic matter
The Chief Financial Officer where the complaint relates to IT Services, Business Services, Estates and Facilities Management, Health and Safety or Finance
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor where the complaint relates to Student and Academic Services or the Library, or where it is not evident to which member of the Vice-Chancellor's Group the appeal should be directed

2.3.2 A member of the Vice-Chancellor's Group who has not previously been involved in the case will be nominated by the VCG member receiving the appeal to chair a panel to hear the case on his/her behalf. The Panel Chair will:

2.3.2.1 acknowledge receipt of the appeal, indicating whether it will be heard or not, within five working days - details will be given in writing where the person hearing the case is able to agree alternative action for redress or where an appeal will not be heard;

2.3.2.2 where appropriate, convene a Student Complaint Panel as indicated below.

2.3.3 The Student Complaint Panel shall consist of the Panel Chair and three members of the Academic Board, or of the Professional Services Group as appropriate where the complaint relates principally to a service provided by a manager who is a member of the Professional Services Group. The exact composition of the Panel shall be determined by the Panel Chair but no member shall have previously been involved with the case. The Panel will meet to consider the complaint, drawing on any evidence that is deemed relevant to the case, normally within 21 calendar days of receiving the appeal.

2.3.4 Whenever a student is interviewed in relation to a complaint they are entitled to be accompanied by a friend. 'Friend' may include a representative from the Students' Union, other personal friend or family member, but excludes any form of legal representation.

2.3.5 The Panel will conduct its hearing as follows:

2.3.5.1 The Panel will invite the complainant (or friend) to provide a statement or produce evidence or witnesses to support the complaint; the manager or person responsible for the service about which the complaint has been made shall not be present. The Panel may ask such questions necessary to explore and test the evidence. The complainant (and friend) will withdraw;

2.3.5.2 The manager or person responsible for the service about which the complaint has been made will be invited to provide a statement or produce evidence or witnesses to address the complaint. The Panel may ask such questions necessary to explore and test the evidence. The manager or person responsible for the service about which the complaint has been made will withdraw;

2.3.5.3 The Panel will then consider the evidence and decide whether the complaint has been substantiated. In reaching its findings, the Panel will be guided by the accepted rules of evidence and the relevance of evidence to the specific nature of the complaint. The Panel should make due allowance for any difficulty that the student may have experienced in presenting his or her case;

2.3.5.4 The Panel Chair will inform the student of the outcome of the Panel's deliberations, including any action for redress to be taken, as soon as possible after the Panel has met;

2.3.5.5 The Panel Chair will ensure that a record is kept.

2.3.6 Complainants who have exhausted the internal complaints procedures will be issued with a formal Completion of Procedures letter and may then consider applying to pursue their cause through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, within three months of the issue of the Completion of Procedures letter. There shall be no further internal appeal against a decision taken by a properly constituted Student Complaint Panel.

3. **Annual Review of Procedures**

- 3.1 Each year a report will be made to Academic Board and to the Professional Services Group by the Director of Student and Academic Services on student complaints that have been addressed within the formal stages of these procedures. This report will be based on the records kept by the Complaints Officers and the Chairs of Student Complaints Panels. A report will also be made to the Equality and Diversity Committee where a formal complaint relates to issues concerning that Committee.
- 3.2 The Academic Board or the Professional Services Group will make any changes necessary to procedures, each year, in the light of this report. The Academic Board and the Professional Services Group will also draw the lessons needed from the successful complaints and ensure that such action as is necessary is taken to prevent a recurrence.

STUDENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE: FLOWCHART

Pre-procedure: discuss with member of staff within six weeks of cause – seek help from SU or Director of Student and Academic Services if necessary

Complaint addressed

Stage One
If dissatisfied write to designated Complaints Officer – seek help from SU or Director of Student and Academic Services if necessary

Stage One
Complaints Officer acknowledges within 5 working days: Investigating Officer identified who investigates and responds normally within 14 days

Complaint addressed

Stage Two
If dissatisfied appeal to appropriate member of Vice-Chancellor’s Group (VCG) within 14 days of outcome of Stage One

Stage Two
Member of VCG acknowledges within 5 working days: either convenes Panel or offers redress or gives reasons why appeal will not be heard

Stage Two
Appeal hearing normally within 21 days of receipt of appeal under Stage Two

Complaint addressed: formal Completion of Procedure letter issued

External
If dissatisfied, consider application to Office of Independent Adjudicator within three months of issue of Completion letter