

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS

1. OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

1.1 You can let us know if you have a concern about an aspect of your student experience at the University of Sussex. Your views are important.

1.2 You may wish to contact us to address your concern(s). Submitting a complaint is one option available but other options are available. These other options maybe more appropriate depending on the nature of your concern(s). Other appropriate options are:

- giving feedback;
- speaking to advisors in the Student Life Centre;
- raising your concern informally with the team involved; and
- mediation.

The 'Alternative Methods to Communicate your Views' section below provides further detail.

We encourage you to consider all options

1.3. Our Student Complaints Procedure operates on a set of principles. They ensure fairness and confidence for everyone through the process. Our principles cover things such as:

- our expectations, including behaving with dignity and respect;
- privacy and confidentiality;
- group complaints; and
- being accompanied or represented.

The [full list of Student Complaints Procedure principles \[PDF 120KB\]](#) is locater here.

2. SCOPE OF THE PROCEDURE

2.1 Who can use this procedure

2.1.1. You can only use this procedure for something that happened to you as a current student.

2.1.2. You can follow the student complaints procedure if you are a:

- current registered student studying at the University of Sussex;
- recent graduate, up to six months after you have left the University of Sussex;
- student who has recently withdrawn (temporarily or permanently) up to six months after withdrawing from the University of Sussex.

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- If you are studying at a [partner institution](#), you may be eligible to complain to us. See the [Partner Institution Complaints](#) section below.

2.1.3. In all cases, you are expected to raise your complaint within our time limits.

2.1.4. We reserve the right to decide, in any given case, which route is best for handling your issue. We also reserve the right not to allow the re-examination of issues that have already been appropriately reviewed by a university process

2.2 What can be considered as a student complaint

2.2.1. Our student complaints procedure may be able to address your concerns. It covers the following areas:

- the delivery of teaching and supervision;
- a non-academic University service, such as a front desk;
- information in a handbook or promotional material;
- facilities, such as buildings on campus; and
- the conduct of a member of University staff.

2.3 What cannot be considered as a student complaint

2.3.1 In addition to the General Principles, we will not pursue complaints:

- considered to be frivolous (unfounded or trivial) or malicious (with vindictive motivation);
- relating to University policy and management. This is because they are overseen by properly-constituted University governance bodies. If you are dissatisfied with our policies and management, [speak to your Students' Union representatives](#). They are members on most University governance bodies and can raise your concern;
- if you are complaining about the Students' Union – [refer to the Students' Union complaints procedure](#).

2.4 Time Limits

2.4.1. You should make your complaint immediately. Typically, within 15 working days of the event that has caused concern. If you are complaining about a series of related events, contact us after the final event.

2.4.2. Additionally, there are time limits beyond the first complaint stage that you must observe, outlined below in the procedure.

2.4.3. We may exceptionally consider complaints outside of our time limits, at the discretion of the University. If you submit a complaint outside of our time limits, and we do not consider it exceptional, we will issue you with a letter explaining

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that you are out of time. This is called a Completion of Procedures letter. You can use this to [contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#).

3. The Procedure

3.1 Overview

3.1.1. Our complaints process comprises of three stages:

- Level 1 – early resolution
- Level 2 – investigation
- Level 3 – review.

3.1.2. The level of a complaint does not reflect the severity of a complaint. We aim to resolve all complaints as soon as possible, typically at the early resolution stage.

3.1.3. The University's categorisation of a complaint (i.e. Level 1/2/3) is final.

3.2 Level 1 – Early Resolution

3.2.1. To submit your initial complaint, get in touch with the relevant service provider (the specific part of the University) where your concern is placed. For example, if your complaint is about the teaching on your course, the response will usually be considered by the Director of Teaching and Learning for your School.

3.2.2. State clearly what you are dissatisfied with, and, how you would like your complaint to be resolved.

3.2.3. You should contact them immediately after the incident – ideally **within 15 working days**.

3.2.4. An early resolution outcome can be verbal or written. You can request your preference. You should get an outcome within 15 working days of your complaint being categorised as a Level 1 complaint. In some circumstances, it may take longer and therefore we will tell you if this is the case.

3.2.5. If you require assistance identifying the appropriate service provider (the specific part of the University) where your concern is placed, contact complaints@sussex.ac.uk.

3.3. Level 2 – Investigation

3.3.1. This stage applies when you have received a response to your Level 1 (early resolution) complaint and the outcome received has not addressed your concerns. If this occurs, you can ask for your concern to be investigated further. This is known as a Level 2 complaint.

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- 3.3.2. In exceptional circumstances, the University may take a decision to escalate a complaint immediately to this Level 2 (investigation) stage. We will inform you of this after you submit your initial complaint. The University decision on the categorisation of a complaint is final.
- 3.3.3. You should submit your complaint **within three months** of receiving your Level 1 (early resolution) outcome.
- 3.3.4. To request your complaint to be considered at this stage, fill in a Level 2 [investigation request form](#).
- 3.3.5. All Level 2 complaints are overseen by the Associate Director (Student Engagement and Achievement), who is part of the Student Experience Division at Sussex. The Office for Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations (OSCAR) manages this process on their behalf.
- 3.3.6. Before we investigate Level 2 complaints, we will:
- send an auto-reply to your form submission;
 - contact you about your complaint, usually within five working days, and may ask for more details so we fully understand your concerns; and
 - confirm whether we are able to investigate your complaint at Level 2.
- 3.3.7. As part of the investigation the:
1. Associate Director, delegated to (OSCAR), will appoint an appropriately senior member of University staff to look into your complaint. This member of staff will act as the Investigator to your complaint;
 2. Investigator will consider all appropriate complaint materials/documentations; and
 3. Investigator writes a report explaining their findings.
- The Investigator may contact you for more information to help them during this process.
- 3.3.8. The Associate Director (Student Engagement and Achievement) will write you a letter to conclude your Level 2 complaint, taking into account the Investigator's findings.
- 3.3.9. You should get an outcome within two months of your complaint being categorised as a Level 2 complaint. In some circumstances, it may take longer and therefore we will tell you if this is the case.

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3.4. Level 3 – Review

3.4.1. This stage applies when you have received a Level 2 (investigation) response and you continue to have concerns. In such circumstance, you can ask for a review.

3.4.2. A review is not a reinvestigation but considers complaints on three grounds.

3.4.3. The three review grounds are:

- A) *there were procedural irregularities in the investigation of the complaint, which had a material effect on the outcome;*
- B) *new evidence can be presented which wasn't available earlier in the process and you were unable to reasonably do so; and*
- C) *the outcome of the investigation is unreasonable based on the weight of the evidence.*

If you consider any of the three grounds to be relevant to your complaint, you can request a Level 3 review.

3.4.4. You should request a review **within one month** of receiving your Level 2 outcome. Requests received later than this are not normally considered.

3.4.5. To request a review, complete the Level 3 review [request form](#).

3.4.6. All Level 3 reviews are conducted by the Director for the Student Experience. The Office for Student Complaints, Appeals and Regulations (OSCAR) liaises with you on their behalf. Where the Director has been involved in an earlier stage of your complaint, they will pass the review over to a member of the [University Executive Group](#).

3.4.7. Before we conduct a review, we will:

1. send an auto-reply to your review submission;
2. contact you about your review request, usually within five working days, and may ask for more details; and
3. confirm whether we are reviewing your complaint.

3.4.8. You will be notified of the outcome of your review, and the reason for the decision, normally within one month of the date your request was accepted. This is a Completion of Procedures document. In some circumstances it may take longer than a month. We will tell you if this is the case. Due to an unusually busy period, review outcomes will be communicated within two months of the day your request was accepted.

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4. Partner Institution Complaints

4.1. Overview

- 4.1.1. If you are studying a [Sussex course run by a partner institution](#), you may be eligible to ask us to review your complaint (the Level 3 stage above). A review is not a re-investigation of your complaint; we assess what happened with your complaint at the partner institution.
- 4.1.2. In the first instance, you must submit your complaint to the partner institution that is providing your course. Do not send it to us before you have done this.
- 4.1.3. The partner institution will respond to your complaint according to its own process. It will progress your complaint to the conclusion of its own investigation stage.
- 4.1.4. Once the investigation stage is complete, your partner institution will confirm that your complaint can be considered further by us, if you choose.
- 4.1.5. If your complaint is not eligible to be considered by us, you should pursue your complaint further with your partner institution.

4.2. Eligibility for a University of Sussex Review

4.2.1. We can only review your complaint if your concern relates to the:

1. quality of your learning opportunities; or
2. academic standards of the award.

4.3. Not Eligible for a University of Sussex Review

4.3.1. In addition to the General Principles, we cannot consider a Partner Institution complaints relating to:

- academic judgement;
- your partner institution's services;
- the conduct of staff not employed directly by us – contact the HR department of your partner institution; and
- other aspects of your experience at the partner institution.

Our decision about whether we can review your complaint is final.

4.4. Time Limits

4.4.1. You must contact us **within 21 working days** of receiving the investigation complaint outcome from your partner institution.

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4.4.2. We will not generally consider complaints outside this period. Our decision is final.

4.5. How to Request a Partner Institution Complaint Review

4.5.1. To request a review, complete the [partner institution complaint review form](#).

4.5.2. For details on what happens in this process, see the 'Level 3 – Review' section above.

5. **Completion of Procedures**

5.1. You will get a *Completion of Procedures* document when we have reached a point where we cannot pursue your complaint any further. The University's decision on this is final.

5.2. You can use your document to request an independent review, should you choose.

6. **Independent Review**

6.1. If you have exhausted our complaints process, or you have received a Completion of Procedures document, you may wish to [contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#) (OIA).

6.2. The OIA provides an independent scheme for the review of university student complaints. To request a review by the OIA, you will need to contact it within 12 months of the date of your Completion of Procedures document.

7. **Support**

7.1. If you need support with a complaint you can go to:

- the [Student Life Centre](#)
- [advocates in the Students' Union](#).

8 **Alternative Methods to Communicate your Views**

8.1. Feedback

8.1.1. We aim to deliver a high standard in everything we do. If you have any feedback, let us know. You can:

- speak directly to the relevant service;
- contact your academic advisor or supervisor;
- fill in module evaluations;
- [speak to a student rep](#); and
- see more ways to [have your say](#).

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8.2. Mediation

8.2.1. We encourage you to consider alternative dispute resolutions as a way of solving issues. Mediation is a free and confidential which **everyone** concerned must agree to participate in the process. It helps people attempt to find their own resolution to the problem with an impartial, independent and trained third party. Find out about our:

- mediation process by emailing complaints@sussex.ac.uk and we will provide guidance;
- [restorative programme](#) if you have experienced prejudice; and
- [mediation service for students in private-sector housing](#).

8.3. Other Procedures

If you're not a current student at Sussex, but you have a concern, see our:

- [unsuccessful university applicant policy](#) and [tuition fee status information](#);
- [Masters applicant feedback, appeals and complaints](#);
- [PhD applicant feedback, appeals and complaints](#);
- [alumni and fundraising complaints procedure](#);
- [staff complaints process](#); and
- [complaints process for members of the public](#)

9. **Miscellaneous**

9.1. The OIA Good Practice Framework for handling complaints and academic appeals: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/resources-and-publications/good-practice-framework/>

9.2. The QAA Guiding Principles for handling concerns, complaints and appeals: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/concerns-complaints-and-appeals>

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