INTRODUCTION

1. The University is a large community engaged in activities of both an academic and non-academic nature. From time to time a student may feel dissatisfied with some aspect of his or her dealings with the University and when that happens it is important that the issue is investigated as quickly as possible.

2. The University welcomes comments or suggestions for improvements to the service we provide to students. Any comments or suggestions for improvement should be addressed, as appropriate, to the member of staff concerned, (such as Head of School, Dean of the appropriate Faculty, College Master, Director of Information Services, President of Kent Union).

DEFINITIONS

3. A student may have specific concerns about the University. In some cases there are special arrangements for dealing with such concerns and the following definitions have been adopted by the University:

i) A student complaint might be about, for example:

- an aspect of University policy
- the provision of a service
- the way a student has been treated by a member of staff.

ii) An academic complaint is any specific concern about the provision of a programme of study or related academic service.

iii) A general complaint about an academic matter (e.g. a particular module) should be referred to the School Staff/Student Liaison Committee in the first instance.

iv) An academic appeal is a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progression, assessment and awards. Academic appeals are covered in the Academic Regulations and associated procedures. Guidance on academic appeals can be obtained from the Faculties Support Office or Kent Union Advice Centre.

Students are also able to appeal against:

a) decisions made by School Disciplinary Committees convened to consider alleged academic offences; and

b) decisions made by the Faculty that they be required to withdraw (due to failure to submit course work, attend classes, for example); and

c) decisions made under the University’s Fitness to Practice procedure; and

d) decisions taken under the University’s Support to Study procedure.
v) Matters relating to the **running of the institution** are covered by the Public Interest Disclosure Act and by the University’s procedures on “Whistle blowing”.

vi) Matters relating to the **discipline of students in relation to non-academic matters** are covered in specific Regulations.

vii) Matters relating to **Kent Union** are covered in the Kent Union Code of Practice.

viii) Matters relating to **harassment and bullying** are covered in the Dignity at Study Policy, which outlines the appropriate route for a student to follow if s/he feels harassed or bullied by a fellow student or member of staff.

Further information about the above may be found on the University's website at: [http://www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html)

### INFORMAL RESOLUTION

4. The key principles of the Complaints Procedure are:

   a) The student should try to **resolve the matter informally in the first instance.** Dissatisfaction often arises from a misunderstanding, which is why the best starting point is with the person whose actions are the cause of dissatisfaction, or with the manager of the office responsible for the provision of the service or implementation of the policy. If you explain to someone what the problem is then they can often provide an immediate explanation or solution. Informal resolution of academic complaints may be sought by talking to the relevant member of academic staff, Module Convenor/Director of Studies/Programme Leader (or equivalent).

   b) Once it is clear that the matter cannot be resolved by informal means, a formal complaint should be made as soon as possible. It is much more likely that the matter will be resolved to the student’s satisfaction if it is raised at an early stage.

   c) Complaints should be dealt with quickly and complainants kept informed of progress if the investigation is prolonged.

   d) Staff are under an obligation not to allow a complaint by a student to have any bearing on the way that the student is treated or assessed.

5. This procedure is designed to deal with any complaint a student might have that cannot be resolved by informal means, except for those matters for which there are separate established procedures such as academic appeals, or a general complaint about an academic matter (e.g. a particular module) which should be referred to the School Staff/Student Liaison Committee. Any student who wishes to complain but is uncertain of the appropriate procedure should seek advice from Kent Union Advice Centre or the Student Conduct and Complaints Office.
COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS

There are three stages to the Complaints Procedure. These are:

i) a formal procedure;
ii) a review procedure; and
iii) a grievance to Council

FORMAL PROCEDURE

6. If, in the student’s view, a complaint cannot be resolved informally then he or she may make a formal complaint within a reasonable period of time (normally no later than three months).

   a) The student should complete a Complaints Form setting out clearly the nature and origin of the complaint detailing what steps have been taken to resolve it informally and explaining why the outcome of the informal procedure is not considered satisfactory. The student should also clearly indicate what remedy/remedies, if any, s/he is seeking. Complaints Forms are available from Student Services, Kent Union Advice Centre, Registry, Accommodation Office and School Offices. The completed form should be returned to the Student Conduct and Complaints Office.

   b) The Student Conduct and Complaints Officer will acknowledge the complaint within five working days of receipt and will let the student know who will be dealing with the complaint. This will normally be the appropriate Head of School/Centre or Head of Administrative Section in the Professional Services.

   c) The person dealing with the complaint will, within two weeks of the referral from the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer, contact the complainant and indicate what action they plan to take, and the date by which they expect any investigation to be complete. If the investigation cannot be completed by the expected date, the person dealing with the complaint will advise the student of the delay.

   d) The person dealing with the complaint will respond in writing to the complainant when any investigation is complete with details of the findings, and if the complaint is upheld will indicate what the outcome will be.

   e) The response to the complaint will be copied to the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer who will maintain a central record of complaints and will report termly to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

   f) If the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer or his or her office is the subject of the complaint then a student should follow the same procedure except that the form should instead be sent to the Director of Student Services.

REVIEW PROCEDURE

7. The formal procedure outlined above should ensure that a complaint is investigated thoroughly. However, occasionally a student may not be satisfied with the outcome, and in that case he or she can request a formal review by the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor /
COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS

Pro-Vice-Chancellor / Dean of Faculty. The Dean of Faculty will review complaints of an academic nature and the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor / Pro-Vice-Chancellor will review non-academic complaints that fall within their area of responsibility.

a) The student should write to the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer to request a review, setting out clearly the basis of dissatisfaction with the findings of the formal investigation. The request for review must be submitted within two weeks of the written response to the formal complaint.

b) The Student Conduct and Complaints Officer will acknowledge the request within five working days of receipt and will refer the case to the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor / Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Dean of Faculty.

c) If the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor / Pro-Vice-Chancellor/ Dean of Faculty considers that the case for review is not well-founded then he or she will dismiss the case and will inform the complainant accordingly, normally within two weeks.

d) If the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor / Pro-Vice-Chancellor/ Dean of Faculty considers that the case for review is well-founded then he or she will initiate an appropriate investigation and will let the complainant know, normally within two weeks, when he or she can expect a response.

e) The relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor / Pro-Vice-Chancellor/ Dean of Faculty will respond to the complainant in writing with details of the findings indicating, if the complaint is upheld, what the outcome will be.

f) The response to the complaint will be copied to the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer who will maintain a central record of complaints and report termly to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

SUBSEQUENT ACTION: GRIEVANCE TO COUNCIL

8. The University's Ordinances give the University's Council the power

"to entertain, adjudicate upon and, if thought fit, redress any grievances of the Officers of the University, the Professors and academic staff, the Graduates or the Students who for any reason feel aggrieved".

9. A student who remains dissatisfied after following the procedures set out above may contact the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer in writing to seek a review of the complaint by the University Council provided that these procedures have been completed and the grievance to Council has been submitted within three months of notification of the outcome of the final stage indicated in the above.

Note: The Council would not normally intervene to change decisions by University Officers or formal bodies which had been properly exercised or determined unless procedural fault, bias, irregularity or other inadequacy was found.

1 Or the appropriate Head of Division for the purposes of this procedure.
COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS

The procedure adopted by the Council for consideration of a grievance from a student (or graduate) is as follows:

i) the case is considered by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor who determines whether it establishes, prima facie, a case for further consideration;

ii) if in the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor’s judgement the grievance establishes, prima facie, a case for further consideration, the Secretary to Council will establish a sub-committee of Council to consider the case in detail. Following the sub-committee’s consideration of the case a report is then forwarded to the Council for its approval;

iii) if the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor determines that the grievance does not establish a prima facie case for consideration, there is no further internal avenue for consideration of the grievance. The student’s only recourse at this point is to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (see below).

Note: Where the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor is unable to act as outlined in (i) – (iii) above (for example due to unavailability or prior involvement in the grievance under review) the grievance will be considered by one of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors or Pro-Vice-Chancellors as determined by the Director of Student Services.

THE OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

10. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints or appeals. When all the University’s internal stages for dealing with student complaints have been exhausted, the University will issue a Completion of Procedures letter. Students wishing to avail themselves of the opportunity for an independent review by the OIA must submit their application to the OIA within three months of the issue of the Completion of Procedures letter. Full details of the scheme will be enclosed with the Completion of Procedures letter.

Note: Further information may be obtained from the OIA’s website: www.oiahe.org.uk

Queries should be directed to the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer, Student Services, Keynes College (scooffice@kent.ac.uk).

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

11. The position in relation to complaints from students following a University approved programme of study at a partner institution is as follows:

i) Academic Complaints: should be submitted following the procedure of the institution in which the student is based; a complainant remaining dissatisfied, who has exhausted the
COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS

complaints procedure of the partner institution, may then submit the complaint as a grievance to the University’s Council (see Sections 8 and 9 above).

ii) **Non-academic Complaints** should be submitted following the procedure of the institution in which the student is based without recourse to the University of Kent. A non-academic complaint means any specific concern, other than one relating to an academic matter as defined in Section 3 ii) above, made by a student with regard to services provided by the institution against which the complaint is made.

**Note:** A list of Kent’s Partner Institutions is held by the Office for Quality Assurance and Validation, Academic Division, Registry.

PROCEDURES FOR COMPLAINTS BY STUDENTS ON PLACEMENTS

12. An academic complaint is any specific concern about the provision of a programme of study, including a student placement or related academic service. A complaint about a student’s experience on a placement may relate to:

i) matters falling under the jurisdiction of the University; or

ii) matters more properly falling under the jurisdiction of the host institution or company.

While advice on which procedure is appropriate should be sought from the Placement Supervisor, matters related to placement learning will normally fall under the jurisdiction of the University. For complaints arising under (i) above, the following procedure should apply:

13. In the **first instance** a complaint should be taken up informally with either the appropriate member of staff or with the Placement Supervisor. This may be done by the student(s) concerned, another student, the Placement Supervisor or another academic member of staff acting on behalf of the student(s) making the complaint. If the student(s) remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the academic complaint further, the matter should be put in writing in line with the above procedures. However, as the placement organisation will need to be consulted, this may necessitate a longer timescale.

QUERIES ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

14. This document is subject to annual review and updating as appropriate. The current version may be found on the Regulations website at:

[http://www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html)

WLC 21.06.13; 25.06.13; 18.07.13; 2.08.13
This procedure is designed to deal with any complaint a student might have that cannot be resolved by informal means, except for matters for which there are separate established procedures such as academic appeals, or a general complaint about an academic matter (e.g. a particular module) which should be referred to the School Staff/Student Liaison Committee.

COMPLAINTS FORM

Full Name
Programme of Study
Address for Correspondence

Please set out clearly the nature and origin of your complaint. You should also clearly indicate what remedy/remedies, if any, you are seeking, where applicable.

[continue overleaf if necessary]

If you have tried to resolve your complaint informally, please say what steps you have taken and why the outcome is not satisfactory.

Signature: Date:

Please return the completed form to the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer, Keynes College, University of Kent (email: scooffice@kent.ac.uk) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days. Students at the Medway Campus should return this form to the reception area on the ground floor of the Gillingham Building.