

University of Kent Complaints Procedure for Students

Introduction

1. The University has a large community of students engaged in activities of both an academic and non-academic nature. From time to time students may feel dissatisfied with some aspect of their 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).
3. As far as is reasonably possible the University will safeguard the interests and wellbeing of students lodging an appeal or complaint and of staff who may be named or otherwise involved.
4. Students will not experience any detriment by reason of making a complaint in good faith. However, in the event that an allegation is frivolous, malicious or otherwise vexatious, the University reserves the right to take disciplinary action against the student. Regulations on student discipline in relation to non-academic matters can be found on the [University Website](#).
5. Complaints should be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality, with information released only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint. No third party should be told any more about the investigation than is strictly necessary in order to obtain the information required from them. If a complaint against a member of staff has been upheld, the student bringing the complaint should be advised of this. However, it is not appropriate to share specific details affecting individual members of staff, particularly as disciplinary action may be taken. It is important that the student is advised of this at the earliest possible opportunity in order to manage expectations.

Definitions of a complaint

6. A student may have specific concerns about the University. The University has adopted the following definition for a student complaint from The Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Appeals (December 2014), which was produced by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education:

“an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about a university’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the university.”

7. A **student complaint** might be about, for example:
 - poor quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided directly by the University
 - complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing a service on behalf of the University
 - the way a student has been treated by a member of staff

8. An **academic complaint** is any specific concern about the provision of a programme of study or related academic service.
9. 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.
10. 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.

Students are also able to appeal against:

- decisions made by School Disciplinary Committees convened to consider alleged academic offences; and
 - decisions made under the University's [Fitness to Practice procedure](#); and
 - decisions taken under the University's [Support to Study procedure](#).
11. Matters relating to the **running of the institution** are covered by the Public Interest Disclosure Act and by the University's procedures on [Whistleblowing](#)".
 12. Matters relating to the **discipline of students in relation to non-academic matters** are covered in specific Regulations. Guidance on appeals against the decision of a Master or Disciplinary Panel can be obtained by emailing the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager at scoffice@kent.ac.uk
 13. Matters relating to **Kent Union** are covered in the [Kent Union Code of Practice](#).
 14. 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.
 15. A complaint from a **research participant** (this will be a person involved with a Kent research project, who may not necessarily be a student at the University) should be referred to the Director of Research Services.
 16. Further information about all of the above may be found on the University's website at: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html>
 17. 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.

A flow chart of the Student Complaints procedure can be found in Appendix 1

Informal resolution

18. The key principles of the Complaints Procedure for students are:
 - 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. If you explain to someone what the problem is 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).
 - Once it is clear that the matter cannot be resolved by informal means, a formal

complaint should be made as soon as possible (normally within three months) using the Complaints Form. It is much more likely that the matter will be resolved to the student's satisfaction if it is dealt with at an early stage.

- Complaints regarding allegations of sexual misconduct will be investigated via the Formal Procedure Stage 1.
 - Complaints should be dealt with quickly and complainants kept informed of progress if the informal investigation is prolonged.
19. This procedure is designed to deal with any complaint a student might have that cannot be resolved by informal means. Matters for which there are separate established procedures such as a general complaint about an academic matter (e.g. a particular module) should be referred to the School/Staff 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.
20. University staff are under an obligation not to allow an informal or formal complaint by a student to have any bearing on the way that the student is treated or assessed.

Formal Procedure Stage 1

21. If, a complaint cannot be resolved informally then a formal complaint can be made within a reasonable period of time (normally no later than three months after the alleged incident took place).
22. The student must 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 must also clearly indicate what remedy/remedies, if any, they are seeking. The completed form should be returned to the Student Conduct and Complaints Office (email: sccoffice@kent.ac.uk). Incomplete forms will be returned to the student. All information regarding informal resolution will be confirmed with the relevant Academic School or Department. If the informal stage has not been exhausted, the student may be referred back to the relevant Academic School or Department.
23. A complaint raised by a group of students will be accepted. Complainants will be responded to individually and contact details for each complainant should be included on the complaint form. In such circumstances the group are advised to appoint a group representative(s) to facilitate communications with the Student Conduct and Complaints Office or Academic School/Department.
24. Students may wish to raise a complaint anonymously. However, investigation of a complaint can only be conducted satisfactorily if the Investigating Officer is able to consider all the background information. This may not be possible if a complaint is sent anonymously.
25. The Student Conduct and Complaints Office will normally acknowledge the complaint within **five working days** of receipt. The information on the form will first be verified with the relevant Academic School or Department and, subject to the completion of this step, the student will be informed who will be investigating the complaint. This will normally be the appropriate Head of School/Centre or Head of Administrative Section in the Professional Services. An Investigating Officer can be appointed to undertake the investigation of the complaint, however ownership of the complaint remains with the Head of School/Centre or Head of Administrative Section.
26. The person investigating the complaint will, within **10 working days** of the referral from the Student Conduct and Complaints Office, contact the complainant and indicate the date, **normally within 35 working days**, by which they expect any

investigation to be completed. If the investigation cannot be completed by the expected date, the person investigating the complaint will advise the student and the Student Conduct and Complaints Office of the delay.

27. The Head of School/Centre or Head of Administrative Section will produce a report for review by the relevant Dean/ Deputy Dean of Faculty/ Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The report will be forwarded to the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager to ensure that due process has been followed. A formal response, in writing, will then be provided to the complainant by the School/Department. This will normally include details of the findings, if the complaint has been upheld, and will indicate what the outcome/remedies will be. The response to the complaint will be copied to the Student Conduct and Complaints Office who will maintain a central record of complaints and will report termly to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.
28. If the appropriate Head of School/Department/Centre/Dean is the subject of the complaint, the same procedure will be followed except that another independent Head of School/Department/Centre/Dean will be asked to undertake the investigation and respond to the complainant(s).
29. If the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager or the Student Conduct and Complaints 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 (email: directorstudentservices@kent.ac.uk).

Formal Procedure: Stage 2 (Grievance to Council)

30. The Formal Procedure Stage 1 outlined above should ensure that a complaint is investigated thoroughly. A student who remains dissatisfied, following the completion of stage 1, may contact the Student Conduct and Complaints Office in writing to seek a review by the University Council. The request should be submitted within **15 working days** of notification of the outcome of the complaint. The Student Conduct and Complaints Office will normally acknowledge the request within **five working days** of receipt and will refer the case to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, once the relevant documentation has been agreed by the complainant.
31. The University's ordinances give the University 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.'

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.
32. The procedure adopted by the Council for consideration of a grievance from a student (or graduate) is as follows:
 - the case is considered by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor who determines whether it establishes sufficient grounds for further review.
 - If, in the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor's judgement, the grievance establishes sufficient grounds for further review, 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. The intention is for the case to be dealt with as quickly as possible, normally within 25 working days. However, the involvement of Council may cause delays. Should this occur the student will be advised of the delay at the earliest possible opportunity in order to manage expectations.

- If the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor determines that the grievance does **not** establish sufficient grounds for further review, there is no further internal avenue for consideration of the grievance. The Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor will dismiss the case and inform the complainant accordingly, **normally within 25 working days**. The student's only recourse at this point is to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (see section 33).

Note: Where the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor is unable to act as outlined 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 as determined by the Director of Student Services.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

33. 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, **normally within 25 working days** of the grievance decision. (Timescales may be longer if a sub-committee of Council is required).
34. Students must submit their application to the OIA within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter being issued by the University. Full details of the scheme will be enclosed with the Completion of Procedures letter. However, further information may be obtained from the OIA's website: www.oiahe.org.uk. Queries should be directed to the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager, Student Services, email: sccoffice@kent.ac.uk.

Partner institutions

35. The position in relation to complaints from students following a University approved programme of study at a partner institution is as follows:
36. 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 of the partner institution, may then submit the complaint as a grievance to the University of Kent Council (see sections 30 to 32 above).
37. Partner institutions may process **complaints on non-academic** grounds according to their procedures for doing so without recourse to the University of Kent. Where such complaints are made with respect to services provided by the University of Kent, the University of Kent's complaint procedure for students should be used.
38. A non-academic complaint means any specific concern, other than one relating to an academic matter (as defined in sections 6 to 17 above), made by a student with regard to services provided by the institution against which the complaint is made.

Procedure for complaints from students on placement

39. An academic complaint is any specific concern about the provision of a programme of study, including a student's 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 of Kent; or
 - ii. matters more properly falling under the jurisdiction of the host institution or company.

40. 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 of Kent. For complaints arising under (i) above, the following procedure should apply:
41. 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.
42. 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

43. This document is subject to annual review and updating as appropriate. The current version may be found on the University of Kent's Regulations website at:
<http://www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html>

Student Services November 2017

Student Complaints Procedure Guidance notes

Please firstly carefully read through the **Complaints Procedure for Students**. Before submitting a Formal Complaint you may wish to discuss your complaint with the Kent Union Advice Centre or GKUnions.

Please ensure that you have attempted to settle your complaint informally first.

Completing the form

The form must be completed in full and all fields filled in. If you have difficulty with the form or do not understand the procedures, you should contact the Student Conduct and Complaints Office, the Kent Union Advice Centre or GKUnions.

Your complaint

You should provide details of the key issues you wish to raise and include the dates when these events took place.

Documentary evidence

It is very important that you attach to your complaint any relevant, letters, emails, notes, minutes or other written evidence that you may have. This will make it easier to investigate your complaint. If you are unsure what to provide, then contact the Kent Union Advice Centre or GKUnions.

Attempts to settle your complaint informally

It is important that you try to resolve your complaint informally before submitting a Formal Complaint. Please tell us what you did to try and achieve an informal resolution, who did you see? What did you discuss? What was the outcome? When was this? Include any correspondence you have.

Your complaint cannot be investigated formally until we have checked that you have attempted to settle things informally first.

Information provided will be verified with the relevant Academic School or Department.

What prevented the complaint being resolved informally?

Indicate what you think prevented an informal resolution of your complaint.

What would you like to happen as a result of your complaint?

Be realistic, but tell us what outcome you are looking for to resolve your complaint.

Declaration

The form must be completed in full and signed before it will be accepted. Once it is received by the Student Conduct and Complaints Office it will normally be formally acknowledged within five working days.

Formal Stage

Once your form is received it will be formally acknowledged and the information verified with your Academic School or relevant Professional Services Department. A report for review by the relevant Dean/ Deputy Dean of Faculty/ Deputy Vice-Chancellor will be produced and a check will take place to ensure that due process has been followed. This stage involves carefully gathering information, discussions, evidence gathering and the drawing of conclusions. To ensure that your complaint is thoroughly investigated we normally allow 35 working days for this stage to be completed.

Grievance to Council Stage

This is the final stage in the University's Student Complaints Procedure. You will normally have 15 working days in which to submit a request. However, if you are unable to meet the deadline for the next formal stage (Grievance to Council) and there are extenuating reasons, you should contact the Student Conduct and Complaints office as soon as possible.

Please contact the Student Conduct and Complaints Office if you wish to receive this form in an alternative format.

Please note that the boxes will expand on typing.

Formal Complaints Form

First name(s)		Title
Family name		
University ID number		
Programme of Study		
Year/Academic stage		
Faculty		
Address for Correspondence (include postcode)		
Email Address for correspondence		
<p>Please set out below the KEY POINTS of your complaint in no more than 500 words.</p> <p>Key Point 1:</p> <p>Key Point 2:</p> <p>Key Point 3:</p> <p>Other Key Points:</p> 		
<p>What documented evidence do you have to support your complaint? Please give details and attach any supporting documents.</p> 		

Who did you approach to resolve your complaint informally? What action, if any, was taken to remedy your complaint? Please note that this information will be checked with the relevant Academic School or Department.

Date	Name	Action taken	Outcome

What prevented the complaint being resolved informally?

Key point 1:

Key Point 2:

Key Point 3:

Other Key points:

How do you propose for this complaint to be resolved to your satisfaction?

Key Point 1:

Key Point 2:

Key Point 3:

Other Key Points:

Declaration

I declare that the information given on this Formal Complaints Form is a true statement of the facts and that I would be willing, if required, to answer further questions related to it.

I agree to the University of Kent using my personal data to process the complaint, in accordance with the Data Protection Act. This may include securely sharing it with the Investigating Officer and/or the University's Insurance Officer.

Signature:

Date:

Please return the completed form to the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager by email to sccoffice@kent.ac.uk. Your complaint form will be acknowledged within five working days.

Flow chart of the Complaints Procedure for Students

