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 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).

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, but 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

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.”

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

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

ii) 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.

iii) 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.
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Students are also able to appeal against:

a) decisions made by School Disciplinary Committees convened to consider alleged academic offences; and
b) decisions made under the University’s Fitness to Practice procedure; and
c) decisions taken under the University’s Support to Study procedure.

iv) Matters relating to the running of the institution are covered by the Public Interest Disclosure Act and by the University’s procedures on “Whistleblowing”.

v) 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 sccoffice@kent.ac.uk

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

vii) 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.

viii) A complaint from a research participant (not necessarily a student at the University) should be referred to the Director of Research Services.

Further information about all of the above may be found on the University’s website at: http://www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html

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

INFORMAL RESOLUTION

7. The key principles of the Complaints Procedure for students 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, with the manager of the office responsible for the provision of the service. 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).

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) University 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.

8. 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/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.
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FORMAL PROCEDURE

9. 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 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, s/he is seeking. The completed form should be returned to the Student Conduct and Complaints Office (email: sccoffice@kent.ac.uk).

b) A complaint raised by a group of students will be accepted. Complainants will be responded to individually and complete 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 Manager or School/Department.

c) 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.

d) The Student Conduct and Complaints Manager 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. A Head of School can nominate a representative to investigate the complaint on his/her behalf. Ownership of the complaint remains with the Head of School/Centre or Head of Administrative Section.

e) The person dealing with the complaint will, within 10 working days of the referral from the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager, contact the complainant and indicate the date, normally within 30 working days, by which they expect any investigation to be completed. If the investigation cannot be completed by the expected date, the person dealing with the complaint will advise the student of the delay.

f) The Head of School/Centre or Head of Administrative Section will respond in writing to the complainant with details of the findings, and if the complaint is upheld will indicate what the outcome will be. The response to the complaint will be copied to the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager who will maintain a central record of complaints and will report termly to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

g) 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).

h) 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).
REVIEW PROCEDURE

10. 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 s/he can request a formal review by the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor / 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 Manager 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 10 working days of the written response to the formal complaint.

b) The Student Conduct and Complaints Manager 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 25 working days.

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 the outcome of the investigation and any action to be taken, normally within 25 working days.

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

f) In exceptional circumstances the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager, in consultation with the Director of Student Services, could trigger a review of a complaint by the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor / Pro-Vice-Chancellor/ Dean of Faculty.

GRIEVANCE TO COUNCIL

11. 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".

12. A student who remains dissatisfied after following the procedures set out above may contact the Student Conduct and Complaints Manager 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 section 10. The Student Conduct and Complaints Manager will acknowledge the request within five working days of receipt and will refer the case to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

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
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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 sufficient grounds for further review.

ii) 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 his/her expectations.

iii) 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 13).

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

13. 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 to Council decision. Students wishing to avail themselves of the opportunity for an independent review by the OIA must submit their application to the OIA within 12 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 Manager, Student Services, email: sccoffice@kent.ac.uk.

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

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

a) 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 11 and 12 above).

b) 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.
A non-academic complaint means any specific concern, other than one relating to an academic matter as defined in section 6) above, made by a student with regard to services provided by the institution against which the complaint is made.

Note: A list of the University 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

15. 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.

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:

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

16. 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 September 2016
Guidance notes on how to complete the Formal Complaints Form

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.

Make sure that you have attempted to settle your complaint informally first.

**Completing the form**

The form must be completed fully and all fields must be 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, letters, emails, notes, minutes and other written evidence that you may have of what has happened. This will make it easier to investigate your complaint. If you are unsure what to provide, again discuss this with 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 are sure that you have attempted to settle things informally.**

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 say how you think the complaint could be resolved so that you would be happy with the outcome. This lets us know what you would like. What we will do will depend on the investigation of the 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 be formally acknowledged within 5 working days.
FORMAL STUDENT COMPLAINTS FORM

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First name(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family name</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>University ID number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme of Study</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year/Academic stage</td>
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<td>Faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address for Correspondence (include postcode)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Email Address for correspondence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please set out below the KEY POINTS of your complaint in no more than 500 words.

Key Point 1

Key Point 2

Key Point 3

Other Key points:

What evidence do you have to support your complaint? Please give details and attach any supporting documents.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Action taken</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What prevented the complaint being resolved informally?

Key point 1:

Key Point 2:

Key Point 3:

Other Key points:

How do you propose that your complaint could be resolved to your satisfaction?

Key point 1:

Key Point 2:

Key Point 3:

Other Key points:

Declaration

I declare that the information given in 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 1998. 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.