

University of Kent Student Complaints Procedure

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Kent's Student Complaints Procedure sets out the way in which a complaint can be made by a student, and the procedures for investigating and responding to a complaint.
- 1.2 The University is committed to providing all students with a high-quality education and student experience. However, we recognise that there may be instances where students have legitimate complaints regarding their course, the services or facilities provided by the School or the University. We take all such complaints seriously, and deal with them in confidence and students will not be disadvantaged for raising a complaint.
- 1.3 This procedure is designed to ensure that all student complaints are heard and responded to in a manner that is timely, fair, transparent, and based on the consideration of relevant evidence. As far as is reasonably possible we will safeguard the interests and wellbeing of any student making a complaint and staff who may be named or otherwise involved in a complaint.
- 1.4 This procedure has been developed in accordance with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's '[Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals.](#)'
- 1.5 The Student Complaints Procedure is overseen by Senate and operated by the Student Conduct and Complaints Office who are responsible for the recording and storage of student complaint files. Members of staff indicated in this procedure are University of Kent staff, unless specifically stated otherwise. Where a complaint is in regards to a KMMS service or facility the student will be referred to the appropriate procedure.
- 1.6 This procedure is distinct from the procedure for Academic Appeal and Admissions concerns. In some rare instances, a complaint may overlap with an Academic Appeal. Where this applies, the Student Conduct and Complaints Office will adopt a proportional response in order to ensure that the requirements of both procedures are enacted in the best interests of all parties. The Student Conduct and Complaints Office reserve the right to defer investigation of a complaint until the Academic Appeal has been resolved.

2. General Principles

2.1 The University of Kent will ensure that the Student Complaints Procedure is:

- Accessible- we aim to be responsive to the needs of students and provide clear information, advice and support with access to representation by the [Kent Union Advice Centre](#) or [GKSU](#)
- Clear- we will give a clear definition of a complaint and explain the complaints process in clear language, which is easy to understand and well signposted.

- Proportionate- we will aim to resolve any complaint as early as possible whether by informal local resolution or formal action.
- Timely- we will give clear time limits in which to bring complaints and will identify those complaints that require swift resolution. We will normally complete all complaints within 90 calendar days of the start of the formal stage 2 complaint.
- Fair- we will ensure that all staff involved in the decision making are independent, trained in complaint investigation and resourced and that each party is given an equal opportunity to present their case. Students will not be disadvantaged as a result of bringing a complaint.
- Independent- decisions will be taken by people without perceived or actual conflicts of interest at all stages.
- Confidential- a complaint will be treated with an appropriate level of confidentiality and will normally only be disclosed to those involved in its investigation.
- Action taken- the University of Kent will ensure appropriate action is taken and will use this process to improve the student experience.

2.2 The University of Kent student should:

- Be respectful and courteous in the submission of a complaint;
- Seek a resolution that is reasonable, constructive and proportionate;
- Provide a full explanation of the complaint in a timely fashion, along with supporting evidence;
- Co-operate with this procedure as far as they are reasonably able.

2. What is a Complaint?

3.1 We have adopted the following definition for a student complaint from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education's [‘Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals’](#)

“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.”

3.2 Examples of a complaint include:

- Failure by the University to provide a satisfactory service.
- Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the University.
- Concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching or administration including, where applicable, that provided by a partner University/college.
- 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.

3.3 Separate complaints procedures are available for [applicants](#) and for the [University's student accommodation](#).

3. Who can make a complaint?

4.1 Complaints can be made by registered students on a University of Kent programme or award, including:

- students on approved periods of interruption
or;
- recent graduates (within three months of graduation).

4. Collective or group complaints

5.1 Complaints will normally be made by individual students, but where appropriate, groups of students are permitted to make a collective complaint where the subject matter is the same or similar. In such circumstances, the group should appoint a spokesperson. Due to the complexity of group complaints they will be automatically progressed to stage 2 of this procedure.

5. Anonymous complaints

6.1 We hope that students have the confidence to raise complaints and know they will be protected. Therefore, it should be unnecessary for a student to raise a complaint anonymously. Anonymity makes it difficult for complaints to be investigated. In cases of doubt a student can seek confidential, independent advice from the Students' Union [Kent Union Advice Centre](#) or [GKSU](#)

6. Third Party complaints

7.1 A complaint from a third party will only be accepted on behalf of a student from a Students' Union representative or other third party if we receive written authority from the student for them to act on their behalf.

7. Complaints regarding staff misconduct

8.1 Complaints regarding serious misconduct or sexual misconduct by staff will automatically be escalated to Stage 2 of the procedure. Details of any complaint about a member of staff may be shared with them, so that they can respond to any allegations made against them. This will be done in line with Data Protection Law and we will discuss the sharing of any documentation the student before it is shared.

8. Timescales for making a complaint

9.1 Complaints should be raised as soon as is reasonably possible. Students who wish to make a complaint should start the informal stage within one calendar month of the incident. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, a formal complaint should be submitted within three calendar months of the incident. If a student has left the University (including recent graduates) they may make a formal complaint up to three months of their graduation or withdrawal from the programme.

9.2 Complaints received outside of these timescales will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and with supporting evidence.

9.3 Complaints will be dealt with within 90 calendar days from receipt of a formal complaint by the Student Conduct and Complaints Office. The University of Kent's Student Conduct and Complaints Office will aim to complete stage 2 within 60 Calendar days of an Investigating Officer being assigned. The Student Conduct and Complaints Office reserves the right to make any reasonable extension to this timescale during the vacation periods.

10. Right to be accompanied

10.1 Students are able to be supported at any meeting by a member of staff, member of a Students' Union [Kent Union Advice Centre](#) or [GKSU](#) or another student of the University. It is a student's responsibility to arrange for a supporter to attend. The meeting organiser must be made aware of any additional attendee at least 2 days before the meeting.

10.2 The Student Complaints procedure is not a legal process, therefore a student is not permitted to be accompanied by a legal representative. A student may only be accompanied by a legal representative if they have received express agreement from the University. Requests for a legal representative to be present should be submitted to sccoffice@kent.ac.uk as soon as is practicably possible. Please note that legal representation may delay the complaints process.

11. Reasonable adjustments

11.1 We will endeavour to ensure that information is available to students at all stages of the procedure in appropriate formats and if required we will make reasonable adjustments to the investigation process.

12. Frivolous or vexatious complaints

12.1 The Student Conduct and Complaints Office reserves the right to reject any complaint without full consideration if it is considered frivolous or vexatious. Examples include:

- complaints that are obsessive, harassing, or repetitive
- insistence on pursuing unmeritorious complaints
- seeking unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes
- insistence on pursuing what may be a meritorious complaint in an unreasonable manner
- complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value
- complaints that repeatedly contain abusive or offensive language

If the Student Conduct and Complaints Office consider that the student's complaint falls into this category, the student will be advised that the complaint will not be considered further.

13. Suspension or Termination of a complaint

13.1 The Student Conduct and Complaints Office will determine if the complaint overlaps with other regulations or policies and in consultation with appropriate University staff, to determine how to progress the complaint, if at all.

13.2 In exceptional circumstances the Student Conduct and Complaints Office may terminate a complaint at any stage, where the student's behaviour in relation to the complaint or investigation is deemed unacceptable or disruptive, or where a complaint is deemed to be vexatious or malicious. In such cases, the University may also invoke the Student Discipline Procedure.

14. Stage 1 – Informal complaint

14.1 The focus of Stage 1 is to support an early resolution to the complaint, prior to the point a formal complaint is submitted. This can involve the student either speaking with an appropriate member of University staff, such as an Academic Advisor or Student Support Officer. Complaints at this stage can be submitted face-to-face, by phone, in writing or by email. Normally a discussion between the appropriate member of staff and the student will then take place. In some cases, service departments operate distinct complaints procedures, such as accommodation, in such cases these informal complaint procedures will take precedent. The Students' Union [Kent Union Advice Centre](#) or [GKSU](#) can offer support and impartial advice.

14.2 Informal complaints are not normally recorded by the Student Conduct and Complaints Office, however, agreed notes from any meetings may be added to a student file as evidence of the complaint and subsequent resolution.

14.3 If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, then a formal complaint can be made and the student will be directed to the formal procedure as soon as possible.

15. Stage 2- Formal complaint

15.1 If a complaint cannot be resolved informally or it is not appropriate for the complaint to be considered at the informal stage, a student may submit a formal complaint by completing a Student Complaints Form. Copies of the form can be found at the end of this procedure

15.2 The Complaints Form should provide information on:

- the nature of the concern as concisely as possible
- include any supporting evidence
- the actions the student has taken to try and resolve the complaint informally (if possible)

- the outcome/resolution the student is requesting
- 15.3 The completed form and any supporting documentation should be submitted by email to the Student Conduct and Complaints Office at sccoffice@kent.ac.uk. Incomplete forms may be returned to the student. Students can seek advice on appropriate supporting evidence from the Students' Union [Kent Union Advice Centre](#) or [GKSU](#)
- 15.4 The Student Conduct and Complaints Office will normally acknowledge receipt of a Complaint Form within five working days. If the informal stage has not been attempted by the student, the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer may refer the complaint back to Stage 1 of this procedure.
- 15.5 The Student Conduct and Complaints Office will arrange for the complaint to be investigated by Student Conduct and Complaints Officer who will normally be independent and have no previous knowledge of the complaint.
- 15.6 A record of all meetings, whether face-to-face or conducted remotely, will be taken and held in the student complaint file. Digital recordings of any meetings are not normally permitted unless there are exceptional circumstances/ reasonable adjustment requirements and it is agreed in advance with the Student Conduct and Complaints Office.
- 15.7 Where necessary the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer may seek advice from specialist services, including legal services. Where there are equality and diversity considerations specialist advice will be sought from the Student EDI Officer or the Student Support and Wellbeing Team. Any such advice will be sought at the earliest opportunity.
- 15.8 The Student Conduct and Complaints Officer will produce a written report and, where appropriate, include supporting evidence and recommendations. The report will be submitted to the Head of Student Conduct and Complaints for comment, to ensure that the correct procedure has been followed and all concerns raised in the complaint have been responded to.
- 15.9 The report will then be submitted to the appropriate Director of Division or Professional Services Department, or nominee, for consideration. Outcomes of student complaints will remain provisional until approved by the appropriate Director or nominee.
- 15.10 If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 but does not meet the grounds for review at Stage 3 the Student Conduct and Complaints Office will close the matter and issue the student with a Completion of Procedures Letter within 28 calendar days of the outcome being provided.

16. Stage 3 – Review

- 16.1 If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 on the grounds stated below they can request a Stage 3 Review by submitting a Stage 3 Form by email to the Student Conduct and Complaints Office, scoffice@kent.ac.uk.
- 16.2 Requests for a complaint review will be granted on the following grounds:
- That correct procedures were not followed in the consideration of the case through the earlier stages of the procedure
 - That the outcome of Stage 2 was not reasonable in all circumstances (i.e. no reasonable decision maker)
 - New evidence that the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process
 - That the request is submitted in writing, including any supporting evidence, to the Student Conduct and Complaints Office, within 10 working days of receiving the outcome of the complaint.
- 16.3 The Head of Student Conduct and Complaints will review the Stage 3 Form and make a decision as to whether the request is based on permitted grounds and is eligible to be considered at Stage 3.
- 16.4 If it is believed that the grounds for a Stage 3 Review have not been met, the student will be informed and a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued within 28 calendar days of the decision.
- 16.5 If it is considered that the request for a Stage 3 Review meets one or more of the grounds, the Head of Student Conduct and Complaints will allocate a senior member of staff from the University of Kent who has not previously been involved, to conduct a review. The purpose of conducting the review is to consider whether the grounds stated have merit. A Stage 3 Review will not normally involve a fresh, full investigation. A complaint must have been considered at Stage 2 before it can be escalated to Stage 3.
- 16.6 The outcome of a Stage 3 Review will be that the Reviewer(s) either dismiss the case, or if it is upheld, the complaint will be returned to a new Student Conduct and Complaints Officer to consider the further evidence. The decision taken by the Reviewer(s) at the Stage 3 Review stage is final. The final decision of the Stage 3 Review will be communicated to the student in writing, with reasons, usually within 28 calendar days from the review request being accepted.
- 16.7 If the outcome of the Stage 3 Review is that a complaint is upheld, a student can still request a Completion of Procedures letter and one will be issued within 28 days of the request being made. If the outcome of the request is the complaint is not upheld (after further review at stage 2), a completion of procedures letter will be sent automatically within 28 calendar days of the Stage 3 decision being issued.

17. Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

17.1 Once all stages of this procedure have been exhausted, the student has the right to refer the case to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#) for further review. An application to the OIA must be submitted within 12 months of the issue of a Completion of Procedures Letter. Full details regarding the OIA's rules and guidelines are available at their [website](#)

18. Students on placements

18.1 A complaint about a student's experience on a placement may relate to:

- matters falling under the jurisdiction of the University; or
- matters more properly falling under the jurisdiction of the host institution or company

18.2 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.

18.3 For complaints arising under (18.2) above, the following procedure should apply:

18.4 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.

18.5 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 a request for review at Stage 3 of this procedure.

18.6 Partner institutions may process complaints on non-academic grounds according to their procedures for doing so without recourse to the University of Kent. Where 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.

18.7 A non-academic complaint means any specific concern, other than one relating to an academic matter, made by a student with regard to services provided by the institution against which the complaint is made.

18.8 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 and this will be communicated to the student.

19. Procedure for complaints regarding Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

19.1 The Apprentice and (host) employer should try to resolve any dispute informally in the first instance. If a student wishes to submit a complaint to their host employer regarding their Higher and Degree Apprenticeship they can seek independent advice from the National Apprentice Helpline, 08000150400, and/or the [Kent Union Advice Centre](#) or [GKSU](#)

20. Complaints in relation to Higher and Degree Apprenticeships employment

20.1 An employment relationship can give rise to concerns or problems in relation to some aspect of the employment, including relationships with colleagues, working conditions or contractual terms.

20.2 Complaints that an Apprentice may have in relation to the employment aspect of the apprenticeship should be raised in accordance with the (host) employer's own internal grievance procedure. If the Student requires support with this process they can contact the University or the Students' Union.

21. Complaints in relation to University for Higher Degree Apprentices

21.1 Complaints from Apprentices regarding the University should be raised in line with this procedure.

22. Recording and Monitoring

22.1 We are committed to continuous improvement and constructive handling of complaints to ensure that similar situations do not re-occur. Complaints are monitored by the Student Conduct and Complaints office to identify trends, areas of good practice and where improvements could be made to University practices. This information will also be used to review and continuously improve the Student Complaints Procedure.

22.2 The Head of Student Conduct and Complaints will use complaint records to submit a termly report to Deputy Vice Chancellor of Education and Student Experience and appropriate Boards and committees. Annual Reports will be submitted to the Graduate School Board and Education Board on an annual basis. Recommendations within this report shall be used to enhance the quality of the student experience. Such reports will not contain any personally identifiable data.

22.3 A summary of actions taken in response to student complaints raised to the OIA will be made available to the University of Kent's Council periodically.

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23. Formal 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.

First name(s)		Title	
Surname			
Student login			
Student ID number			
Programme of Study			
Year/Academic stage			
Division?			
Address for Correspondence (include postcode)			
Email Address for correspondence			
<p>Please set out below the KEY POINTS of your complaint.</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>			
<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.</p>			
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 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. This may include securely sharing it with the Investigating Officer and/or the appropriate University's Insurance Officer.

Signature:

Date:

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

24. Stage 3 Review 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.

First name(s)		Title
Surname		
Student login		
Student ID number		
Address for Correspondence (include postcode)		
Email Address for correspondence		
Please indicate your reason for requesting a review		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That correct procedures were not followed in the consideration of the case through the earlier stages of the procedure. Please provide further details below. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That the outcome of Stage 2 was not reasonable in all circumstances (i.e. no reasonable decision maker). Please provide further details below. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New evidence that the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process. Please provide supporting evidence with this form. 		
How do you propose that your complaint could be resolved to your satisfaction?		
<p><i>Declaration</i></p> <p>I declare that the information given in this Stage 3 Review Form is a true statement of the facts and that I would be willing, if required, to answer further questions related to it.</p> <p>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 appropriate University's Insurance Officer.</p>		
Signature:	Date:	

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