

**Section P.1 Student Complaints Procedures**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The University of Worcester is committed to providing high-quality services to its students and the University welcomes comments and suggestions from students about the services it provides. Occasionally however, students may wish to make a complaint about the services they receive from the University or the Students' Union.
- 1.2 These Procedures define the grounds for students to bring their dissatisfaction or concern to the attention of the University and how the complaint will be investigated and heard.
- 1.3 While a student who brings a complaint in good faith will not be disadvantaged for having done so, any student who brings a malicious complaint may be subject to disciplinary action.

**2. Definitions**

**Complaint** Any matter falling within the scope of this procedure which is the ground for complaint by a student against an individual member of staff or group of staff employed by the University or the Students' Union. This includes complaints concerning the student's experience during approved professional or other work placements, although in some circumstances it may be appropriate for the complaint to be handled under the Procedures of the placement provider. Further guidance is included in the University's protocol on student placements.

**Head of Department** the Head of the Academic Unit responsible for the complainant's course or Head of the Service against which the student lodges a complaint or President of the Students' Union.

**Advice** at all stages, involving a hearing, the student has a right to be accompanied by a representative, who may speak on the student's behalf if they wish. This may be another student or member of staff of the University, a representative of the Students' Union or someone external to the University. It shall not, normally, include a student's legal adviser except in cases where the University itself decides to take legal advice, in which case the student will be notified and may choose to be represented by a legal adviser.

**3. Principles**

- 3.1 In the interests of the student, the process should be simple and comprehensible. In this respect, the relationship of this procedure to others needs to be clarified.
- 3.2 In the interests of the students and the University, complaints should be resolved as quickly as possible.
- 3.3 With the agreement of the student and of staff concerned, the complaint may be referred exceptionally, to a higher stage in the process, omitting earlier stages; or to a mutually acceptable alternative means of resolving the complaint.
- 3.4 The student making the complaint will be allowed reasonable time to seek advice for any meeting which forms part of the process.

**4. Grounds for making a complaint**

4.1 A student may make a complaint:

- (a) in respect of the student's experience at the University including their relationship with the administration or any services such as accommodation, catering, information services etc.  
  
Complaints about services provided by academic departments should be made to the relevant Head of Department; complaints concerning service departments should be made to the relevant Head of Service.
- (b) concerning discrimination by the University on the grounds of age, gender, race, disability or sexual orientation.
- (c) who are dissatisfied in their dealings with the Students' Union or who consider themselves to be unfairly disadvantaged as a result of their choosing not to be a member of the Union.

- 4.2 The University will not investigate complaints which are made anonymously.
- 4.3 The University will not investigate a complaint which is already being considered as part of an Academic Appeal.
- 4.4 The Procedures do not cover complaints brought by one student against another which are regulated by either the Student Code of Conduct or the Dignity at Work and Study procedures.
- 4.5 Complaints will not be accepted from third parties.

**5. Procedure**

**5.1 Informal resolution**

As a general principle, the University anticipates that complaints will normally be dealt with informally in the first instance. The student who has a complaint should first speak to the person who is immediately responsible for the situation or their course leader and try to resolve the cause of concern. The student must make this initial approach as soon as possible after the event or series of events, which prompted the complaint.

Where a member of staff receives a complaint they should investigate promptly and with due regard for the student's privacy and confidentiality. They should respond as soon as possible after the complaint is raised.

**5.2 Stage One – Review by Head of Department/Service**

In cases where a complaint falling within this procedure is not resolved informally the student must raise the matter in writing with the relevant Head of Department. Where the complaint is about or directly involves the Head of Department, the complaint will be dealt with under Stage 2 of these procedures.

The Head of Department, after reviewing the case, may identify simple and remedial action which may be taken to remedy the complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant. In such cases, the Head of Department will propose such action in writing to the student. This shall be done within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. Should the student remain dissatisfied with the action proposed, s/he may, within 5 working days of receipt of the letter from the Head of Department, request that the complaint be referred to Stage 2 of the Procedure. The request should be made to the Head of Registry Services.

**5.3 Stage Two – Review by another Head of Department/Service**

Where the student complaint has not been resolved through Stage One, the matter will be dealt with under Stage Two of the complaints procedure. The University's Complaints and Appeals Officer will appoint an Investigating Officer who shall be: another Head of Department in the case of complaints about services provided by an academic department; another Head of Service in the case of complaints about services provided by a central service. Arrangements will be made for the student making the complaint to discuss the matter with the relevant Head of Department or Service. The nature of the complaint will be defined and recorded, with a dated copy being kept by both parties. The appointed person shall then investigate the complaint and take evidence from parties as she/he determines necessary. The student may be accompanied by a representative in any meetings which take place. If the matter is not resolved within 15 working days or subject to further investigation in a way which is satisfactory to the student, the complaint may be referred to Stage Three. The decision of the Investigating Officer will be communicated by the Complaints and Appeals Officer to the parties concerned.

## Academic Regulations and Procedures: Students Complaints Procedures

### 5.4 Stage Three – Review by Complaints Committee of Academic Board

If the matter has not been settled by the above stages, an aggrieved student may bring the complaint to the Vice Chancellor but must do so within ten working days of receipt of the outcome. If the complaint is against the President of the Students' Union, the Vice Chancellor may refer the case directly to the external person appointed to deal with such complaints.

The Vice Chancellor shall establish a Complaints Committee comprising 3 members of Academic Board nominated by the Vice Chancellor, one of whom shall chair the Committee. The proceedings and outcome will be minuted by the Head of Registry Services except in cases where the complaint refers to services for which the Head of Registry Services is responsible. In such cases, the Vice Chancellor will appoint another senior officer to service the Committee. The student may be advised at the hearing by a representative. The Complaints Committee should be convened within 20 working days. If the matter is resolved in a way which is not satisfactory to the student, the student may request that the matter be referred to the Board of Governors. Such a request must be made to the Vice Chancellor within 10 working days of the receipt of the decision of the Complaints Committee.

The guidelines for the Procedure for Hearings of the Complaints Committee are set out in the Appendix 1.

The Committee might decide that the outcomes of assessment were affected by the matters complained of. In such cases it shall have the power to recommend that the relevant paragraphs of the Procedures for Appeals by Students against Academic Decisions on the grounds of Material Error or Irregularity in the Conduct of an Assessment shall apply. The Committee and its Chair will act in place of the Appeals Committee of Academic Board.

The decision of the Committee will be communicated by the Head of Registry Services to the parties concerned. Normally, such communication shall be made within 2 working days of the Committee's decision.

### 5.5 Stage 4 – Review by Complaints committee of Appeal to Board of Governors

On receipt of a request to refer the complaint to the Board of Governors, the Vice Chancellor will refer the matter to the Registrar and Secretary who shall, within 20 working days of receipt of the request, convene a sub-committee of three members of the Board of Governors who will receive and review all papers relating to the complaint and will interview the complainant, who may be advised at the hearing by a representative. The proceedings of the meeting will be minuted by the Registrar and Secretary. The decision of the Committee will normally be communicated to the parties concerned within two working days. Where the decision of the Governors is not to uphold the complaint, the letter to the complainant will draw attention to the individual's right to refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

## Academic Regulations and Procedures: Students Complaints Procedures

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### **6. Costs and Remedies**

- 6.1 The University will meet the reasonable costs incurred by a student in bringing a successful complaint. This shall include any travelling expenses a student incurs in travelling to any hearing where this takes place outside semester time. It shall not include costs of any legal advice the student may choose to take.
- 6.2 In cases where a complaint is upheld an appropriate remedy will be applied.

### **7. Monitoring**

- 7.1 Records of all complaints will be maintained and details shall be included in the annual report of the Head of Department or Service concerned and notified to the Complaints and Appeals Officer.
- 7.2 Complaints dealt with under Stages 2 and 3 of the Procedure must be notified to the Complaints and Appeals Officer who shall make an annual report to the Representations Committee. Complaints will be monitored according to the gender, ethnicity, age and any disability of complainants. Such information will be used only for monitoring progress and any student who wishes to may refuse to provide relevant information and will not be penalised in any way as a result.

Note: Where these Procedures state that certain actions will be taken within a specified timescale, and this is not possible (e.g. because of the timing or because key information takes longer to obtain) students will be kept fully informed of the progress of their claim.

Enquiries about these Procedures should be directed to the Complaints and Appeals Officer, in Registry Services.

## Academic Regulations and Procedures: Students Complaints Procedures

Version reference: 1.2

Date document was approved and comes into effect: 4 February 2010

Author of the document: Kevin Pickess

Date document is due for review: 1 February 2013

### Revision History

Committee	Date	Change
Academic Board V1.2	4 February 2010	Minor modifications to the procedures
Academic Board v1.1	30 January 2008	Delete: Appendix 1 - List of Service Departments. Add: Appendix 1 - Procedure for Hearings and references to procedure; Minor corrections.
Academic Board v1.0	16 June 2004	New Procedure Approved

## Appendix 1

### **Procedure for Hearings as a result of a Complaint being referred to a Complaints Committee (Stage 3) or Appeal to Board of Governors (Stage 4)**

Hearings will normally follow this procedure in outline. However, the Chair of the Committee has a general discretion over the running of Hearings according to individual circumstances. In particular, the Chair may use his or her discretion to adjourn proceedings or curtail evidence or statements in order to ensure that the Hearing is conducted in an orderly and reasonably expeditious manner.

All evidence will be heard in the presence of Committee members, the student and his or her companion and the Secretary. Should any party need to leave the meeting, the hearing will be adjourned until they return.

The introduction of additional material will not be permitted unless it was not known to the student, or was unavailable, at the time of the original submission. Additional material will be admitted at the discretion of the Chair of the Committee who will, if necessary, defer the hearing to allow the new material to be considered.

The format of the meeting shall normally be as follows:

- a) Private meeting of the Committee to agree on matters of process and procedure;
- b) The Student and his or her representative invited to join the meeting;
- c) The Chair will summarise the procedure to be adopted and ask if there are any procedural questions;
- d) The facts relevant to the case will be introduced by the Chair;
- e) The student will be invited to make an initial statement summarising the complaint;
- f) The Committee may then question the student;
- g) The Committee may invite representatives pertinent to the complaint such as the Investigating Officer at Stage 2 to join the meeting and answer specific questions associated with complaint;
- h) The student and his or her companion will be given an opportunity to comment/raise questions of the representative;
- i) The student and his or her companion may then make a final statement;
- j) All parties other than the Committee members and Secretary will be asked to withdraw;
- k) The Committee will deliberate in private and come to a decision, either straightaway or at an adjourned meeting.

The Secretary shall take a record of the proceedings. The formal minute of the Committee shall record those present and in what capacity present, the decision of the Committee and the reasons for its decision.