

Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Summary/Description:
The complaints procedure outlines the process for students wanting to make a complaint about the university's services or staff.

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Introduction

Purpose of the procedure

We are committed to providing high quality education and services to all our students. However, we recognise that there may be times when you feel that you have not received the high quality of education or level of service that you are reasonably entitled to expect.

We aim to provide a supportive environment for you, and to be responsive to your concerns when they are raised. We view the Student Complaints Procedure as an opportunity to monitor and make improvements to our services.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is broadly defined as “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.”

The complaints process is designed to provide an opportunity for you to make a complaint about the University’s services or staff. We will investigate all issues that are raised and deal with them through a process that is fair, consistent, timely and easy to follow.

Overview of the Student Complaints Procedure

There are 3 Stages to the complaints procedure;

- Stage 0: Local Consideration - you must start your complaint at Stage 0
- Stage 1: Formal consideration at Faculty/Directorate level
- Stage 2: Formal review by the Stage 2 Review Panel

After the internal University processes have finished, you will have the opportunity to have your complaint independently reviewed by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

1. Principles

- 1.1 We encourage early and local resolution wherever possible by operating a complaints process that is simple, open and accessible.
- 1.2 A group of students can make a collective complaint (a ‘Group Complaint’) providing:
 - One of the group is named as the main contact for purposes of communication
 - All students in the group agree in writing that the main contact can represent them in the group complaint.
 - All students in the group have been directly affected by the matter being complained about.
- 1.3 We recognise that making a complaint can be stressful. Wellbeing support is available from Student Wellbeing Services further information can be found <https://www.gre.ac.uk/support> or free and independent advice is available from the Students’ Union Advice Service (see section 12).
- 1.4 Your complaint will usually only be seen by staff involved with investigating and responding to it. However, to keep the process fair anyone named in the complaint has the right to know some or all of the details of the complaint. If we think that there is a serious risk of harm to you or anyone named in the complaint, we may refer our concerns to others in the university.
- 1.5 For complaints that fall under the remit of the Student Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy, the following options are available to you:

- a) If you have experienced any form of harassment, including bullying, discrimination, hate crime, and/or sexual misconduct, you are strongly encouraged to make a disclosure through the University's [Report + Support](#) portal.
- b) Alternatively, you may choose to make a disclosure of sexual misconduct or bullying and harassment direct to a member of the University's staff as follows:
 - i) Complaints about other students should be raised with your faculty or, where the complaint relates to conduct in halls of residence, to Accommodation Services (accommodation@gre.ac.uk) for consideration under the Student Disciplinary Procedure or the Accommodation Conduct Procedure as appropriate.
 - ii) Complaints about members of staff should be reported in the first instance using Stage 0 of this procedure. Subsequent investigation will determine whether an allegation about a staff member should be referred to the Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Any staff member receiving a disclosure of sexual misconduct affecting a student will refer the disclosure to the Report and Support team for further action (reportandsupport@greenwich.ac.uk).

- 1.6 Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered because we need to collect appropriate information from all the parties involved to be able to properly investigate the complaint.
- 1.7 All investigations and decisions about a complaint at any stage of the procedure will be made fairly and objectively. Anyone with a material personal interest in the complaint will neither investigate nor adjudicate.
- 1.8 Where a shortcoming in provision or process is identified, the University will be guided by consultation with colleagues in Academic Registry, who will assist in making fair and consistent recommendations to address the individual circumstances of the case.
- 1.9 You will not be disadvantaged because of raising a concern or making a complaint, provided your intention is honest. If we think you have made a complaint just to upset or cause problems for someone, we will reject the complaint and may take disciplinary action.
- 1.10 If we consider that you have raised issues in your complaint that should be dealt with under the *Academic Appeals Procedure*, we will confirm the procedure and the order in which the issues raised will be dealt with.
- 1.11 We cannot consider complaints where the facts are substantially similar to a current or previous complaint being considered under this procedure, or any earlier version of the Student Complaints Procedure. If such complaints are made persistently and unreasonably, we may refer the case to the Student Disciplinary Procedure.
- 1.12 Exceptionally, with the agreement of all parties, complaints may be escalated to the Stage 1 of the process without having been considered at Stage 0.
- 1.13 **Freedom of speech and academic freedom**
In any matter falling under this policy, the University will have particular regard to, and place significant weight on, the importance of freedom of speech within the law, academic freedom and tolerance for controversial views in an educational context or environment. The University's commitments to freedom of speech and academic freedom are set out in the Freedom of Speech Code of Practice. In the event of any conflict between this policy and the Freedom of Speech Code of Practice, the Freedom of Speech Code of Practice will take precedence.

2. Timescales for consideration of complaints

- 2.1 All timescales referred to in this document are measured in 'calendar days'. This means every day of the week including Saturdays and Sundays **except for** university closure days such as public holidays and Christmas closures. Full details of term dates and university closures can be found

here <https://docs.gre.ac.uk/rep/sas/term-dates>.

- 2.2 Expected timescales for the consideration of complaints at the local consideration stage are detailed in Section 6.
- 2.3 We aim to resolve complaints within 90 calendar days from the date of submission of the Formal Complaint form identified in section 7 to the formal complaint outcome. Specific timelines for individual stages of the procedure are detailed within the relevant sections.
- 2.4 We expect evidence to be provided at the time of a complaint, if you cannot provide evidence when you submit your complaint, you must tell us why. Where we agree to a delay in evidence being submitted, we will confirm the deadline. The 90 day resolution time will begin from the time we have all the necessary evidence to consider your complaint.
- 2.5 In some cases it can be necessary to exceed the 90-day resolution time, for example where:
- The complexities of the case warrant extended scrutiny.
 - An appeal is being considered simultaneously and it is considered in your best interests to await the outcome of the appeal before resolving the complaint.
 - Your complaint is submitted just prior to the Christmas holiday period when the University is closed.
- 2.6 All instances of delay at any stage of the procedure will be communicated to you in writing with an explanation for the reasons for the delay.

3. Who does this procedure apply to?

- 3.1 You can submit a complaint if:
- You are a currently a student;
 - You are on an approved leave of absence (for instance, interruption of studies);
 - You are a graduate or former student, provided that your complaint is lodged within three months of completing or formally ceasing your studies.
- 3.2 You cannot submit a complaint if:
- You have applied for admission to the university but have not yet been accepted and registered;
 - You are a graduate or former student but failed to lodge a complaint within three months of completing or formally ceasing your studies;
 - You are a postgraduate research student complaining about a role as an employee of the University. Complaints about employment should be directed to the University's People Directorate Department.
- 3.3 If you are registered for a University award provided by a collaborative partner college or other organisation and are dissatisfied with the provision at your college, you should initially pursue your complaint in accordance with the college's complaint procedure. See *Appendix A* for further information.
- 3.4 If you are registered on a higher or degree apprenticeship you may use this procedure in relation to complaints about the delivery of the academic learning aspects, and related services, of your apprenticeship. See *Appendix B* for further information.
- 3.5 A complaint from a third party will not ordinarily be considered except in evidenced exceptional circumstances such as if you are incapacitated for medical reasons or hospitalised or have a known mental health issue or a registered disability.

4. What does the procedure cover?

- 4.1 Complaints against any academic or non-academic service provided by the University, including but not limited to:

- 4.1.1 Failure to meet obligations including those outlined in module/student handbooks
- 4.1.2 Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the University
- 4.1.3 Concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching, supervision or administration
- 4.1.4 Poor quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided by the university
- 4.1.5 Complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing a service on our behalf
- 4.1.6 Complaints about behaviour by members of staff that come under the remit of the [Student Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) (see section 1.5 for details)

5. What issues cannot be considered under this policy?

- 5.1 Complaints about other students' behaviour. These should be directed to your faculty or, where it relates to conduct in the University's halls, to Accommodation Services, as relevant for consideration under the appropriate procedure.
- 5.2 Complaints about results. These should be addressed via the University's [Academic Appeals Procedure \(Taught\)](#) or [Academic Appeals Procedure \(Research\)](#).
- 5.3 Complaints about the Greenwich Students' Union, which has its own [policy and procedures](#).
- 5.4 Complaints relating to applications to the University, which are considered under the [Admissions Policy and Procedure](#).
- 5.5 Where the matter has already been, or is being, considered under the Academic Appeals, Attendance Appeals, Fitness to Practise or Student Disciplinary procedure(s).

6. Stage 0 - Local Consideration

- 6.1 You must endeavour to resolve a complaint locally first. Advice on how to approach local consideration is provided on our website <https://www.gre.ac.uk/docs/rep/sas/student-complaints-procedure>. The University will not consider a Stage 1 Complaint where there has not been an evidenced attempt to resolve the issue locally.
- 6.2 It is intended that the local consideration process should take no longer than a month but there will be occasions when this process has to be extended. All parties will be kept informed of any delays and the reasons for them. A Stage 1 Complaint will not be considered out of time if it immediately follows the outcome of a local complaint consideration.
- 6.3 If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the local resolution, you may escalate your complaint to Stage 1 of the procedure.

7. Stage 1 - Formal Consideration

- 7.1 Your complaint must be submitted via the Digital Student Centre, using the complaint form and accompanied by any evidence you wish to have considered. The Academic Registry casework team will acknowledge receipt of your Complaint.

If you do not have access to the Digital Student Centre because you are withdrawn, then you should contact the Academic Registry Casework team who can provide an alternative format (formalcomplaints@greenwich.ac.uk).
- 7.2 Your complaint must be submitted within 3 months of the date of the incident which your complaint refers to. Any Complaint received after this deadline will usually be deemed out of time for consideration and you will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter including details of the OIA Scheme (see Section 10).
- 7.3 The Academic Registry casework team will administer the complaint and be available to you and staff at all stages of the process (formalcomplaints@greenwich.ac.uk).
- 7.4 Where the Academic Registry Casework team identify that your complaint is something which cannot be considered under the Student Complaint Procedure (section 5 refers) you will be signposted to the appropriate procedure and your complaint will be considered to have been withdrawn.

- 7.5 Where no evidence is provided with your complaint and no request is made for additional time to supply it, your complaint may be concluded based on the information available.
- 7.6 Where simple remedial action is identified that may resolve the complaint to your satisfaction, the Academic Registry casework team will offer an immediate resolution to your complaint. If you are satisfied with the resolution offered, your complaint will be considered resolved. If you are not satisfied, your complaint will continue through the investigation process.
- 7.7 A member of the Academic Registry casework team will either act as the Investigating Officer or appoint a senior member of staff in the relevant Faculty or Directorate to act as an Investigating Officer who will receive a copy of the Complaint Form and any accompanying documentation.
- 7.8 The Investigating Officer will identify and act upon those complaints which may require a particularly swift response, for instance in the case of provision for a declared disability or where the known mental health challenges could be exacerbated by delays.
- 7.9 The Investigating Officer may request to interview you and/or other parties named in the complaint throughout the investigation. You will be offered the opportunity to bring a supporter to any meetings. A record of any interviews that take place will form part of the complaint file.
- 7.10 Any member of staff named in the Complaint will be entitled to see information relating to them in order that they may respond to the Investigating Officer and may seek support and advice from a colleague or their trade union.
- 7.11 Everything submitted in relation to the complaint will be dealt with confidentially and only disclosed as necessary to progress the complaint, or as required by law.
- 7.12 You should expect a written response to your complaint within 28 calendar days from the date of acknowledgment. Any delays will be notified to you in writing with an update on your case.
- 7.13 The Investigating Officer's report will explain the outcome of the complaint in the following terms: upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

In the case of upheld and partially upheld complaints, the response will detail what resolution the university is offering to correct the situation. Where the outcome is not upheld, an explanation will be provided.

- 7.14 Following the outcome of your Stage 1 Complaint:
 - a) If you are satisfied with the resolution offered, the complaint is deemed to be resolved.
 - b) If you are not satisfied with the resolution offered and are able to demonstrate grounds for your dissatisfaction, you may request a review of the Stage 1 outcome using Stage 2 of the procedure. This must be done within 14 calendar days from the date of notification of the outcome.
 - c) If no reply is received from you within 14 calendar days from the date of notification of the outcome, it will be presumed that you do not wish to pursue the complaint, and no further action will be taken.

8. Stage 2 – Review

- 8.1 You may request a review of a Stage 1 complaint outcome providing you can demonstrate one or more of the following grounds:
 - a) There is new evidence that would have significantly affected the outcome and could not reasonably have been made available when the complaint was made;
 - b) There is evidence that not all of the relevant information was considered at Stage 1;
 - c) That the decision is unreasonable given the facts of the case;
 - d) That the complaint was upheld but the proposed remedy is inappropriate.

- 8.2 Your request for review must be lodged within 14 calendar days of receiving your Stage 1 outcome and must be submitted via the Digital Student Centre, using the complaint review form and accompanied by any evidence you wish to have considered. The Academic Registry casework team will acknowledge receipt of your Complaint.

If you do not have access to the Digital Student Centre because you are withdrawn, then you should contact the Academic Registry Casework team who can provide an alternative format (formalcomplaints@greenwich.ac.uk).

- 8.3 The Academic Registry casework team will acknowledge receipt of the Stage 1 Outcome Review Form and pass to the Head of Academic Registry (or nominee) to consider the review request and associated evidence. Further evidence may be requested at this stage.
- 8.4 Following the initial consideration, you will be advised that either:
- Where simple remedial action is identified that may resolve the complaint to your satisfaction, the Head of Academic Registry (or nominee) will offer a resolution to your review request. If you are satisfied with the resolution offered, your review request be considered resolved. If you are not satisfied, your review request will continue through the Stage 2 Process.
 - There are no grounds for taking the matter further. You will be informed of the outcome and issued with a Completion of Procedures letter including details of the OIA Scheme (see Section 10); or
 - There are grounds for further investigation. If this is the case, a Stage 2 Review Panel will be convened to undertake a final review of your complaint.

9. Stage 2 Review Panel

- 9.1 The Stage 2 Review Panel [the 'Panel'] will comprise the following membership, none of whom will have had any prior involvement in the case:
- Deputy Vice Chancellor or nominee (Chair)
 - A senior member of staff from a non-related faculty or directorate
 - A representative from the Students' Union
- 9.2 A Secretary will be appointed by Student & Academic Services to service the Panel. The Secretary is not a member but will be present throughout proceedings to advise on regulatory and procedural matters and take an accurate record of the meeting.
- 9.3 You will normally be given a minimum notice period of 14 calendar days of the date and time of the meeting.
- The notice of the meeting will be accompanied by copies of all relevant documentation considered during your complaint.
- 9.4 You have the right to be heard in person by the Panel and will usually be expected to present your own case.
- 9.5 You may be accompanied by a friend or supporter of your choice or a representative of the Students' Union. You should inform the Secretary of the name of the person accompanying you in writing in advance of the meeting.
- 9.6 You may invite witnesses in support of your case providing that you have informed the Secretary in writing at least 5 calendar days in advance of the meeting.
- 9.7 A representative of the Faculty or Directorate will be invited to attend to respond to issues raised in the review request.
- 9.8 The Panel may request supplementary information from you or the Faculty/ Directorate before reaching a decision, within a given deadline, the Panel will normally determine its final decision within 14 calendar days of the receipt of the supplementary information.

- 9.9 You will normally be notified in writing within 7 calendar days of the decision of the Panel. This will include the reasons for their decision. If the complaint is deemed upheld or partially upheld, the Panel will consider and recommend suitable redress.
- 9.10 Any member of staff named in the complaint will be entitled to request a copy of the outcome.
- 9.11 This marks the end of the University's consideration of the complaint. You will be informed of the outcome and issued with a Completion of Procedures letter including details of the OIA Scheme (see Section 10).

10. Independent Adjudication

- 10.1 If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint process you may be able to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) providing that your complaint is eligible under its Rules, which are available on the [OIA website](#).
- 10.2 You will need to submit an OIA complaint Form to the OIA within **twelve months** of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. Information on how to submit a complaint can be found on the OIA website <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>.
- 10.3 Any Completion of Procedures letter relating to a formal complaint about an accommodation issue will contain details of the ANUK Scheme as well as that of the OIA.
- 10.4 If you are studying for a higher or degree apprenticeship, you can request the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to review whether the degree apprenticeship provider has properly investigated your original complaint in line with its procedures. Complaints about providers should be sent to: complaints.esfa@education.gov.uk or via: The Complaints Team, Education and Skills Funding Agency, Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT.

11. Reporting, Monitoring and Review

- 11.1 The Academic Registry will maintain a database of student complaints for each academic session and provide an annual report to the Student Success Board. It will be the responsibility of the Student Success Board to monitor the data and make recommendations to Faculty Student Success Committees as appropriate.
- 11.2 It will be the responsibility of the Academic Registry to review the Student Complaints Procedure and its effectiveness and to make recommendations for changes, where appropriate, to be considered by the Student Success Board.

12. Advice and Support

Free independent advice and advocacy is available from the University of Greenwich Students' Union at www.greenwichsu.co.uk/advice

[Report + Support](#) is the University's portal for disclosing any form of harassment, including bullying, discrimination, hate crime and sexual misconduct. Disclosures can be made anonymously or by speaking to an advisor. The site also provides information about these issues and the University's policies and guidance.

APPENDIX A

Information for students registered for a University award provided by collaborative partner colleges or other organisations (the 'delivery provider')

1. Complaints about service-related issues (such as IT or crèche facilities) provided by the delivery provider must be pursued through the delivery provider's complaints procedure. The delivery provider should be responsible for conducting the formal and review stages of the complaints process for this type of complaint.

UK Partner Colleges that are members of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) scheme will issue a Completion of Procedures Letter at the end of that process.

Information on how to access your delivery provider's complaints procedure will be set out in the programme handbook.

2. Complaints about the academic quality¹ or academic standards² of the programme or its delivery (other than issues which fall under the remit of an academic appeal) should still be considered initially through your delivery provider's complaints procedure.

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome once you have exhausted all stages of your delivery provider's complaints procedure, you may request a final review of the outcome under the University's *Final Review Procedure* within 21 calendar days of the delivery provider's final response.

Further details of how to request a final review can be found in the [Final Review Procedure](#) document.

¹ **Academic quality** is concerned with how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them.

² **Academic standards** are the standards that individual degree-awarding bodies set and maintain for the award of its academic credit or qualifications. Individual degree-awarding bodies are responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining the grading/marketing schemes and any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above and below the threshold academic standards.

APPENDIX B

Information for students registered on a higher or degree apprenticeship.

If you are registered on a higher or degree apprenticeship, then you may use this procedure in relation to complaints about the delivery of the academic learning aspects of your apprenticeship.

Complaints about the practical learning aspects provided by the employer to the apprentice should use the complaints procedures provided by the employer.

The University and the employer will notify the other party where a complaint is submitted and will provide them with full details of the complaint to determine the most appropriate procedure for resolving the issues identified. Both parties will work together in good faith to try to resolve any complaints as quickly as possible within the remit of the procedure being followed.

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome once they have exhausted all stages of the complaints procedure, you can request the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to review whether the degree apprenticeship provider has properly investigated your original complaint in line with its procedures (see Section 10 of this document).