



The University of Surrey  
**Students' Union**

# **Complaints & Discipline**

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## Introduction

Good complaint handling<sup>1</sup> means:

1. Getting it right
2. Being customer focused
3. Being open and accountable
4. Acting fairly and proportionately
5. Putting things right
6. Seeking continuous improvement

Although included together in this schedule, this is not intended to indicate that complaints and discipline are interlinked; they are included together as a general section 'for when things go wrong'. It is important that all Officers and Staff value complaints and do not dismiss them as an irritation or nuisance.

While every attempt has been made to allow for all eventualities, should a situation arise which is not adequately covered by this schedule then the board of trustees has the authority to decide on what action to take within the spirit of this schedule.

This schedule is not intended to be a rigid, process-driven, 'one-size-fits-all' approach to complaint handling, and each response to an individual complaint should be proportionate to the circumstances. This means taking into account the seriousness of the issues raised the effect on the complainant, and whether any others may have suffered injustice or hardship as a result of the same problem.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/improving-public-service/ombudsmansprinciples/principles-of-good-complaint-handling-full>

## **Complaints**

The following procedure outlines the formal method for resolving complaints. Where possible, it is preferable that any complaint is handled swiftly and informally before advancing to this formal procedure.

### **Step 1 Making a complaint**

1. Complaints will be accepted from any individual, entity or representative body.
2. All complaints will be handled in the same manner regardless of whom or what is making the complaint.
3. Complaints will only be accepted in writing either by letter or e-mail.
4. Anonymous complaints will not be accepted.
5. There is no prescribed format for complaints, the complainant does not have specifically state that they are making a formal complaint.
6. Complaints will be acknowledged within three working days of receipt
7. The initial acknowledgement will state
  - a. the expected timescale in which the complaint will be resolved
  - b. the name of who will be dealing with complaint and how to contact them
8. Members have the right under the code of practice to complain directly to the University of Surrey as detailed in 36 if they do not wish to use this complaints procedure

### **Step 2 Handling of complaints**

9. The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring the administration of complaints is handled correctly according to this procedure
10. The Chief Executive may delegate each complaint to a complaint handler. This will be communicated to the complainant as per 7b.
11. The complaint handler should not be involved or implicated in the original complaint
12. The complaint handler is responsible for
  - a. Requesting further evidence if required from sources as appropriate to resolve the complaint.
  - b. Maintaining communication with the complainant.
13. The complaint handler should only request additional information as is required to investigate the complaint.
14. The complaint handler must respond to the complainant every five working days with an update on their complaint
15. A final response must be made within three working weeks

### **Step 3 Responding to complaints**

16. Once the complaint handler has a final response to the complaint, this will sent directly to the complainant
17. A copy of the complaint response will be kept in the register of complaints
18. If no further response is received from the complainant within three working weeks the complaint will be closed

### **Putting things right**

19. The aim of the complaint resolution should be to return the complainants and, where appropriate, others who have suffered the same injustice or hardship as a result of the same maladministration or poor service, to the position they were in before this took place. If that is not possible, it means compensating complainants and such others appropriately.
20. Financial compensation for non-financial losses or inconvenience must be authorised by the President and Chief Executive and will be determined by precedent where possible
21. Unit managers under the direction of the Chief Executive have the discretion to provide refunds from trading areas
22. Performance issues arising from sub-contractors will be handled by the contracting unit manager
23. Performance issues arising from staff will be dealt with through the procedures outlined in the staff handbook under the direction of the chief executive
24. Performance issues arising from officers (non-staff issues) will be dealt with by the President and/or Union Chairperson

### **Confidentiality**

25. Complaints are not regarded as confidential, even if marked as such.
26. If an officer or staff member has been complained about, they have a right to know as far as is practically possible.
27. Complaints of a sensitive nature will be anonymised for board reports.

### **Learning from complaints**

28. A summary report of complaints will be presented to the board of trustees annually
29. An overview of complaints will be included in the annual report
30. The chief executive will be responsible for maintaining a record of complaints for the purposes of determining precedents
31. Complaints received regarding sub-contractors or third party suppliers will be passed on for review and action



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## **Appeals**

32. The complaint process should resolve complaints satisfactorily when carried out correctly, however it is possible that once concluded the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, there are several possibilities for this
  - a. The handler did not take into account an aspect of the complaint that was not known to them at the time.
  - b. The complaint resolution did not follow a precedent
  - c. The complainant is not satisfied with the resolution.
33. Every complainant has the right to request a trustee to review their complaint following the resolution, stating why they are not satisfied with the resolution
34. The trustee reviewing the complaint may agree with the resolution or request that the complaint is looked at again by another complaint handler.
35. It is recognised that on occasion no resolution would be sufficient, and a minority of complainants may be unreasonable or persistent in pursuing complaints. In these instances the board of trustees may agree to cease dealing with the complainants' case. It shall be made clear that the Union complaints procedure has been exhausted at this point.
36. If, having exhausted the Union's complaints procedure, or being otherwise unhappy to use the internal complaints procedure, the complainant is still not satisfied; he or she has the right to ask the University to review that complaint independently. Such complaints should be submitted in writing to the University's Dean of Students. The Council of the University may appoint an independent person to investigate and report on the complaints. In that event, the investigating officer shall report to the Council.
37. The decision given by or on behalf of the Council shall be final.
38. The Union shall cooperate in implementing promptly any remedial action recommended by the Council.