



# **Student Complaints Policy**

**Owned by: Head of Student Services**

**Approved by: Senate on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

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**Version 1.5 – Typographical amendments June 2019**

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## Student Complaints Policy

### 1. Aims & objectives

The aim of this policy is to provide an opportunity for anyone who is or was registered as a student at the University to resolve any complaint in respect of different aspects of his / her relationship with Regent's University London (Regent's). The term 'student' includes those who are or were enrolled or provisionally enrolled on a programme of study offered by Regent's as well as those who have left the University within the last three months.

The objective of this policy is to ensure that student complaints are dealt with fairly and appropriately, by providing clear and accessible information to staff and students on how the student(s) concerned can make his / her views known and receive an appropriate response. All complaints will be managed with a regard to confidentiality as appropriate and in accordance with data protection legislation and University policy on data. In addition, students and staff may access support for this process through the Student Support team. This policy is informed by the OIA good practice framework for handling complaints and appeals:

<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers-and-good-practice/good-practice-framework/handling-complaints-and-academic-appeals.aspx>

#### What kind of complaints does this policy cover?

The aim of this policy is to cover complaints relating to the quality of teaching or supervision, or other services or circumstances that relate to the delivery of a programme of study, or student experience at Regent's. This may include relationships with academic or administrative staff, or complaints in respect of any University services. Examples of such complaints can be found in Appendix 1.

The procedure to be followed under the Student Complaints Policy does **not** cover the following situations:

- i. Complaints about other students. These in the first instance should be directed to the Head of Programme or Assistant Dean of the complaining student's programme of study.
- ii. Complaints about disciplinary matters or bullying and harassment from another student. These are covered under the University's Student Disciplinary Policy and Student Code of Conduct.
- iii. Extenuating circumstances applications.

If a student does not agree with a particular University policy or regulation, but does not wish to dispute the fact that the policy or regulation has been fairly and correctly applied to them, the matter should be raised by the student with the relevant Student Council President, so that their concerns can be raised at the appropriate committee. The Student Complaints Procedure should not be used in these circumstances.

In the event of a set of circumstances legitimately giving rise to grounds for both an academic appeal and a formal complaint, the issue should be brought to the attention of the Registrar who shall determine, in consultation with the appellant/complainant, the process in which the matter shall be reviewed. The requirements of the respective regulations/procedures will be fully adhered to.

The Student Complaints Policy does not cover allegations of criminal activity or criminal intent. These allegations will immediately be referred to the Head of Student Services and the Police.

## **2. Guiding principles**

The Student Complaints Policy is concerned primarily with the student experience and ensuring that the appropriate frameworks are in place to achieve a high quality experience for Regent's students. It also seeks to aid staff by setting out clearly defined processes and procedures, which are both transparent and fair.

### Definitions

#### *Feedback*

It is important to distinguish between a complaint and feedback. Regent's seeks and welcomes the views of its students. Any student may provide feedback which will be useful to a faculty, institute, department or service when reviewing its policies and operations, without invoking this policy. Students are encouraged to provide feedback at a local level to the appropriate school, department or service provider in a prompt and constructive manner.

#### *Complaint*

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint may be 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 expression of dissatisfaction may take the form of an informal complaint (verbal or written e.g. email) or a formal complaint made using the [Student Complaints Form](#) (which can be found on the Student Hub).

### Principles

The University aims to balance the rights of the student complainant and those of any person complained against; all parties must be treated with dignity and respect. Where a complaint is made against a staff member, and there may be a conflict of interest for the staff member conducting the investigation, an independent investigator will be appointed. Students should not expect to suffer any disadvantage or reprisals for making a complaint in good faith, and any evidence of recrimination should be brought immediately to the attention of the Head of Student Services. If, however, a complaint is judged to be malicious or vexatious, the student concerned may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

If it is not possible and / or appropriate to deal with the issue at a local level then the member of staff to which the complaint is made may recommend that the complaint proceed directly to the formal stage of the complaints procedure (stage 2) outlined below.

Only complaints submitted using the [Student Complaints Form](#) will be dealt with as formal complaints.

Students are encouraged to seek advice from the Student Union regarding the complaints process.

### 3. Policy statement

Regent's aims to resolve quickly and fairly any complaint that a student may have about different aspects of his / her relationship with Regent's University London. These aspects include relationships with academic or administrative staff, any complaints in respect of any services, such as Accommodation, Catering, Finance, and any complaints in respect of academic programmes or the delivery of such programmes.

Regent's is committed to managing complaints in a way that:

- Is timely and efficient, to facilitate a speedy resolution
- Is fair and transparent to all parties
- Promotes informal conciliation where appropriate
- Promotes feedback and best practice to inform service departments, faculties and institutes, and enhance the student experience

The Student Complaints Policy applies to any student who is or was enrolled or provisionally enrolled on a programme of study offered by Regent's University London. This includes programmes which are externally validated, as well as all programmes leading to a Regent's University London award.

A group of students may use the procedure outlined below to make a collective complaint provided that one student identifies him / herself as the lead complainant and contact for purposes of communication. However, this does not mean that all students within the group of complainants will receive the same outcome as a result of the complaint.

Any student wishing to make a complaint is encouraged to do so personally. A complaint from a third party other than the student will be considered only if the student is incapacitated for medical reasons or hospitalised. This may also be permitted in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Head of Student Services or nominee.

Anonymous complaints will not be considered.

### 4. Implementation of this policy

All staff and students at Regent's are expected to be responsible for implementing this policy. This policy will be available to all staff, students and prospective students.

### 5. Process and procedure

#### a) Stages of complaint

Stage		Regent's will aim to resolve complaints within:
1	Informal level	2 weeks
2	Formal review	5 weeks
3	Appeal	3 weeks

In exceptional circumstances the University may extend the deadlines outlined above provided that there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so. In such cases the student will be notified of the extension in writing by the University which will provide a revised deadline for resolution. Regent's is committed to ensuring that all complaints are resolved to completion within 90 days of the initial complaint being received if all stages are required.

Complaints should always start at the informal level wherever possible. At all stages of the complaints process, students are encouraged to keep a record of action taken to resolve the complaint and keep copies of any relevant correspondence.

All complaints will be regarded as informal until a [Student Complaints Form](#) has been received by Student Services.

If a disabled student making a complaint has a Student Support Agreement and requires any reasonable adjustments to be made during the complaints process, please contact the Disability Support Manager.

b) Making a complaint

i. Stage 1: Informal level

Students are expected to try to resolve complaints directly, informally and quickly with the person concerned. In a minority of cases it may be more appropriate for the student to contact their Assistant Dean, Head of Programme, Course or Module Leader, Faculty / Institute Manager or Student Services. In the case where a complaint relates to one student complaining about another, the complainant should approach the relevant Module Leader, Head of Programme or the Head of Student Services (or nominee).

All complaints should be made within two weeks of the perceived unsatisfactory circumstances occurring. The University reserves the right not to progress any complaint which is submitted outside of this deadline.

The student is expected to explain clearly what the problem is and what outcome they are seeking, and the member of staff is expected to listen to the complaint. Staff dealing with complaints are encouraged, whenever practical, to meet with the student to establish the precise cause of dissatisfaction, to explore the remedy sought by the student and to foster a mutual understanding of the issues involved. Complaints will, as far as is reasonable, be treated confidentially.

Although the complaint is considered to be informal at this stage, the member of staff will take reasonable action to remove the cause of the complaint and prevent recurrence. It may be, however, that further discussion about the overarching principles of a complaint is required in meetings or committees before the matter can be resolved. Specific details of complaints or complainants will not be discussed at such meetings. Where appropriate, the complainant will be informed of the outcome of any University discussions relating to their complaint.

Regent's University London will not formally respond to informal complaints in writing. If their complaint is not upheld, or if the student feels that the resolution of their complaint is not satisfactory they can move to Stage 2 of the complaints process.

It is expected that most complaints will be resolved at this informal level.

ii. Stage 2: Formal Review

Where the complaint has not been dealt with, or if stage 1 of the Student Complaints Procedure does not provide a satisfactory outcome for the student, they can make a formal complaint within one month of the event taking place.

In such cases, the student must complete a Student Complaints Form (found on the online Hub) to set out:

- What their complaint is
- What the supporting evidence is
- Why informal resolution of the complaint was unsuccessful
- What outcome(s) they are hoping to achieve.

Supporting evidence must be submitted with every complaint form. This may include signed witness statements, letters, emails and any other relevant information.

Upon completion, the form should be submitted to the Student Services department via the following email address: [studentcomplaints@regents.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@regents.ac.uk)

Student Services will only review complaints submitted using the [Student Complaints Form](#), and the form should be submitted within one month of notification of the outcome of stage 1 of this procedure.

If the form does not set out clearly and with reasonable brevity the points indicated above, the student will be asked to resubmit the form within 5 working days, in a manner that enables proper consideration of the complaint to take place.

Student Services will acknowledge receipt of the [Student Complaints Form](#) within 5 working days. Student Services will then review the form to determine whether the issue identified by the complainant is covered by the Student Complaints Policy, or whether the student should be referred to a different policy or procedure.

If Student Services believe that the student has valid grounds for a complaint and has submitted appropriate supporting evidence, the complaint will be added to the Complaints Log, and a record stored of the complaint. A complaint without adequate grounds and / or evidence or that is incomplete will be returned to the complainant for clarification.

Once the complaint has been added to the Complaints Log, Student Services will refer the complaint to a trained Complaints Officer who is not connected to the school, department, or service area to which the complaint relates, who will then investigate the matter.

The Complaints Officer will make reasonable inquiries to establish the facts of the case. Prior to any investigative meetings, it will be made clear to any person whose co-operation is sought that questions, answers, comments, or the production of documents, relate to an investigation into a formal complaint. Any student or member of staff participating in an investigation arising under this procedure has the right to be accompanied by:

- Students - Student Union representative, parent, friend or disability advocate
- Staff - Trade Union or professional association representative or work colleague. The Complaints Officer must keep Student Services updated at all stages of the investigation.

The Complaints Officer will be advised through the process by Student Services where necessary.

The investigation and its outcome will be fair and reasonable.

If the investigator decides to uphold the student's complaint, they will confirm this with their investigation report to the Student Complaints Panel who will then decide any action they deem reasonable and appropriate to resolve the complaint, bearing in mind the outcome(s) sought by the student. The Chair of the Student Complaints Panel will write to the complainant to confirm the outcome of the investigation and inform the Student Services department, where the outcome can be logged.

The Complaints Panel will be chaired by the Head of Student Services or their delegate and have the following membership;

- Head of Student Services (Chair)
- Senior academic member of staff
- Senior manager from Professional Services
- Student representative
- Secretary from Registry or nominee

Where the upheld complaint either expressly or by implication infers incompetence or misconduct by a member of staff, then the matter may be referred to the Human Resources department for investigation. Under the staff disciplinary procedure, the findings of the complaint investigation will not constitute incontrovertible statements of fact, but merely evidence in that investigation.

The student will be informed of the next stage of the Student Complaints Procedure if their complaint is not upheld or if the student feels that the resolution of their complaint is not satisfactory.

The written reply will be sent by Chair of the Complaints Panel within 5 weeks of receipt of the [Student Complaints Form](#). In exceptional circumstances, if it is envisaged that the investigation will take no longer than 5 weeks, the student will be informed by the Complaints Officer of the reason and an expected date of response.

Complainants, and individuals named in complaints, can request an update of the progress of the complaint at all stages by contacting the Complaints Officer who is leading the investigation.

**iii. Stage 3: Appeal**

Where a student believes that the student complaint procedures have not been followed correctly or new evidence has been produced that was not considered as part of the original complaint or their complaint has not been appropriately addressed, or the decision regarding the outcome of their complaint is unreasonable they have the right to appeal against the decision of the Stage 2 investigator. New evidence may be considered at the discretion of the University provided that there is a justified reason as to why the evidence was not provided at the beginning of the formal investigation stage.

In such cases, the '[Appeals Form: Student Complaints](#)' must be sent with full supporting evidence to Student Services. Student Services will acknowledge receipt of the appeals form within 5 working days.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor will review the appeal form in consultation with the Registrar and decide whether there is any new evidence that has come to light or whether the Student Complaints Procedure has not been followed correctly.

All appeal forms should be submitted within 5 working days of notification of the outcome of Stage 2 of the student complaints procedure. The University reserves the right not to progress any appeal which is submitted outside of this deadline. An appeal form submitted without adequate grounds and/or evidence will be dismissed and the appellant informed.

If, after reviewing the appeals form, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor deems that the student has sufficient grounds for an appeal and has provided sufficient evidence, the Complaints Log will be updated.

**Membership of the Appeal Panel**

- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Chair) or nominee
- Senior academic member of staff
- Senior manager from Professional Services
- Student representative
- Secretary from Registry or nominee

The Appeal Panel may reopen the investigation and call witnesses. The panel will have the following options available to them:

- Uphold the appeal and decide upon an appropriate resolution - in which case, both the student and the Stage 2 investigator will receive a written explanation of the decision. A "Completion of Procedures" letter will also be issued to the complainant.

- Uphold part, but not all, of the appeal and decide upon an appropriate resolution – in which case, both the student and the Stage 2 investigator will receive a written explanation of the decision. A "Completion of Procedures" letter will also be issued to the complainant.
- Dismiss the appeal – in which case the student will receive a written response giving reasons, and a "Completion of Procedures" letter will be issued to the complainant.

The complainant will be notified in writing of the Appeals Panel's decision within ten working days of the panel meeting, by the Chair of the Appeals Panel. The decision of the Appeals Panel is final.

Where the upheld appeal either expressly or by implication infers incompetence or misconduct by a member of staff, then the matter may be referred to the Human Resources department for investigation. Under the staff disciplinary procedure, the findings of the complaint investigation will not constitute incontrovertible statements of fact, but merely evidence in that investigation.

c) Office of the Independent Adjudicator

Once a formal "Completion of Procedures" letter has been issued, if the student feels their complaint is still not resolved or that the outcome is unreasonable in relation to the evidence, they may raise their complaint with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

The OIA is an independent body that operates externally to the University. It will not normally look at a complaint until all relevant internal complaints procedures have been exhausted. It should be noted that the role of the OIA is to review the final decision of the University; it is not to re-investigate the complaint. Further information is available from the OIA website <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>.

The Head of Student Services will be notified by the Registry of all complaints referred to the OIA. The Head of Student Services will update the Complaints Log and record accordingly.

## **6. Measurement of policy's success**

The annual number of complaints and appeals reaching stages two and three of the Student Complaints Process will be used as a measure of the policy's success.

## **7. Monitoring of the policy**

Monitoring of this policy is conducted throughout the year as part of the University's normal business processes.

## **8. Review of the policy**

The Head of Student Services will maintain a Complaints Log of all cases brought

under stages 2 and 3 of the Complaints Policy. The Head of Student Services will file an annual report to the Senate Student Experience Committee, on:

- a) the number, type (stage 2 or 3) and the School or Department the complaint is about;
- b) the outcomes of the complaints;
- c) any recommendations for amendment to the policy and procedures.

Senate will oversee the effectiveness of this policy and recommend the terms of a review where required.

**Related documents:**

Regent's University London Academic Regulations  
Regent's University London Code of Conduct for Students  
Regent's University London Extenuation Policy  
Regent's University London Disciplinary Policy  
Regent's University London Fitness to Study Policy  
Regent's University London Under 18s Safeguarding Policy  
Regent's University London Halls Code of Conduct  
Regent's University London IT Acceptable Use Policy  
Regent's University London Smoking Policy

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Examples of student complaints**

All student complaints should initially be addressed under the informal stage of the Student Complaints Procedure. The following are examples of complaints that may need to move to the formal stage of the procedure:

- failure by the University to meet obligations including those outlined in course/student handbooks
- 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 institution
- 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.
- A student with an identified disability is not offered appropriate alternative assessments.