

## Student complaints procedure

The University welcomes feedback from its students. Whilst most of the feedback we receive is positive, we recognise that from time to time problems do arise and students may occasionally wish to express concern or dissatisfaction with aspects of the University or the services it provides. We aim to use the feedback gathered from such complaints positively to help us improve the services we offer and to enhance the University experience for all students.

The following circumstances need to be distinguished, one from the other:

- **Student appeal:** where a student is dissatisfied with a formal process which has culminated in a decision, for example decisions by examination boards, the outcome of disciplinary procedures, or the investigation of examination offences. The University has in place appropriate internal procedures for appeals to be considered; information is given in student handbooks and on the student web pages [www.reading.ac.uk/internal/student/stdserv-home.aspx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/student/stdserv-home.aspx) or available from the RUSU advisers [www.rusu.co.uk/advice/](http://www.rusu.co.uk/advice/).
- **Student complaint:** where a student has a complaint against the University relating to the delivery of teaching, support services, administration, facilities, or other aspects of the student's relationship with the University.

The procedure outlined below applies to **Student Complaints**.

*Before embarking on any stage of the Procedure, students are strongly recommended to seek advice from the RUSU Advice Service ([www.rusu.co.uk/advice](http://www.rusu.co.uk/advice))*

### Time limit for raising a complaint

It is generally in the best interests of both the student and the University if complaints are raised as soon as possible after the relevant matter occurred.

A complaint will normally only be accepted for consideration if it is informally raised in accordance with Stage 0 of the procedure within **one calendar month** of the relevant matter occurring.

If the student is dissatisfied with the Stage 0 outcome, or if the student has been informed that the concern or issue is not suitable for informal resolution, the student shall have **5 working days** to submit a formal Stage 1 complaint.

**NB.** If a student has not complied with a time limit specified in this procedure, the University will consider whether such student, exceptionally, has good reason for delay.

### Principles of the Student Complaints Procedure

- This procedure applies to all registered students of the University as defined in Ordinance.

- Any student who makes a complaint in good faith will not be adversely affected by the fact of the complaint, whether or not the complaint is upheld.
- The student will have a fair opportunity to present their complaint and will be provided with clear reasons for the outcome of each stage of the procedure.
- It is generally in the best interests of both the student and the University to resolve issues and concerns at Stage 0, the least formal and lowest stage of the Procedure.
- The University will endeavour to manage the student's expectations of the process at all stages of the procedure.
- A group of students may jointly raise a complaint.
- A complaint made anonymously will only be considered under exceptional circumstances, and where the nature of the complaint makes an investigation appropriate.
- Disputes regarding matters of academic judgment will not be considered under the Student Complaints Procedure.
- The University will implement reasonable adjustments to the procedure where appropriate.

## **Advice and guidance for students**

Students are encouraged to seek independent and confidential advice from the Advice Service in Reading University Students' Union. <http://www.rusu.co.uk/advice/>

The complainant may be accompanied by a 'friend' to any meeting or interview. The friend shall be, unless otherwise agreed by the person authorised to consider the complaint, a currently registered student, a member of the Academic Staff of the University, a RUSU Student Officer, or a member of the RUSU Advice Service team. If a student is unable to attend in person, they may attend via teleconference.

## **Expected conduct during the procedure**

All students are expected to maintain good conduct, in accordance with the University's Regulations for Student Conduct, during the procedure.

In exceptional circumstances, the University reserves the right to terminate the consideration of a complaint as outlined in the [Procedures for dealing with frivolous and vexatious complaints in appeal of results and student complaints](#).

All parties are expected at all stages to maintain appropriate confidentiality. However, details of a complaint may need to be shared with relevant colleagues to enable a full investigation to be carried out.

Staff and students asked to provide any information or documents are expected to co-operate with the University in its investigation.

The Student Complaints Procedure is not a disciplinary procedure, although an upheld complaint may give rise to such a procedure. The University may decline to settle the complaint while any matter intrinsic to it is the subject of disciplinary or other formal procedures within the University.

## Student Complaints Procedure

**NOTES:** *Before embarking on any stage of the Procedure, students are strongly recommended to seek advice from the RUSU Advice Service [www.rusu.co.uk/advice/](http://www.rusu.co.uk/advice/)*

*For students on Henley Business School programmes, references throughout this Procedure to 'Head of School' should be taken to refer to the relevant Head of Programme*

### Stage 0: Informal early resolution stage

- 0.1 The purpose of Stage 0 is to swiftly address issues or concerns on an informal basis.
- 0.2 The University expects that the majority of issues and concerns can be resolved informally at Stage 0 through discussion and negotiation between the student and staff at the point closest to where the matter originated.
- 0.3 To tell informally the University about an issue or concern, the student should email the relevant member(s) of staff from their University email account.
- 0.4 The student should:
  - be specific about the problem;
  - describe the problem succinctly;
  - provide supporting documentary evidence where available and appropriate;
  - state the outcome requested – be clear and realistic;
  - if unsure who to contact, email [studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk).
- 0.5 If requested by the student, the relevant staff member(s) will arrange to promptly meet with the student to discuss the issue or concern.
- 0.6 Stage 0 will normally result in one or more of the following outcomes:
  1. a solution to the student's issue or concern;
  2. an explanation where the desired outcome cannot be achieved;

3. an apology, where it is appropriate to do so;
4. the University may deem that it is not appropriate to consider the issue or concern informally, and direct the student to submit a formal Stage 1 complaint within 5 working days.

Examples of reasons why the University may deem that the issue or concern is not suitable for informal consideration includes, but is not limited to:

- a) If a detailed investigation is required;
- b) If the student is seeking a financial outcome;
- c) If it is not appropriate to grant the outcome the student is seeking on an informal basis;
- d) If the complaint is of a sufficiently serious nature.

0.7 Where it is reasonable to do so, or at the request of the student, the staff member should issue a written outcome of this stage of the procedures within five working days.

0.8 If the student is dissatisfied with the Stage 0 outcome and the student wishes to pursue the matter as formal complaint, or if the University has deemed that it is not appropriate to consider the issue or concern informally, the student should submit a formal complaint by submitting a Stage 1 complaint form no later than **five working days** after receiving the Stage 0 outcome. Section 1.1 of this procedure explains how a student can submit a formal complaint.

## **Stage 1: Raising a formal complaint**

- 1.1 To submit a formal Stage 1 complaint, the complainant must complete the Stage 1 complaint form ([www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/qualitysupport/Complaint\\_Form\\_-\\_Stage\\_1.docx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/qualitysupport/Complaint_Form_-_Stage_1.docx)) and email it to [studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk) from their University email account.
- 1.2 A student may submit a Stage 1 complaint form:
  - a. if the student is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 0; OR
  - b. if the University has informed the complainant that it is not appropriate to consider the issue or concern informally, and the University has directed the student to submit a Stage 1 formal complaint, as described in section 0.6 of this procedure.
- 1.3 A Stage 1 complaint form will only be considered if it is received within 5 working days from the Stage 0 outcome, or within 5 working days from informing the student that the issue or concern is not suitable for informal consideration.
- 1.4 If the student has not engaged in Stage 0 of the procedure, the Student Complaints and Discipline Officer may refer the student to Stage 0 if it is appropriate to do so. Examples of reasons where it might not be appropriate to consider an issue or concern at Stage 0 are listed in Section 0.6 of this procedure.
- 1.5 Information to be entered on the Stage 1 complaint form includes:

- complainant's name, address, contact telephone numbers, University email address, student number and programme of study;
- the nature of the complaint (attaching any supporting evidence where available);
- an outline of the steps taken to resolve the complaint informally at Stage 0, if applicable;
- details of the outcome the complainant is seeking.

1.6 Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged by the Student Complaints and Discipline Office within three working days (subject to the availability of the relevant contact).

1.7 The Student Complaints and Discipline Office will then refer the complaint to the person responsible for the area within which the complaint arose. In the majority of cases this will be the Head of School, the Head of Programme (for HBS students), the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies (for PGR students), the Head of Function, or equivalent. This person shall be responsible for investigating the complaint and issuing the Stage 1 outcome letter and Stage 1 investigation report.

1.8 The Stage 1 complaint shall be allocated to a member of staff who has had no previous involvement in the matter. The name of the person conducting the Stage 1 investigation will not normally be confidential.

1.9 The University will be vigilant to complaints which require swift resolution. Example of this includes, but is not limited to: complaints which involve an allegation of serious harm, medical evidence that a complaint is having a significant impact on the student's health, complaints relating to serious service failure or delay and highly sensitive complaints. However, the University must balance the requirement to investigate complaints thoroughly with the desire for swift resolution.

1.10 Normally, the staff member investigating the complaint will offer to interview the student to facilitate the investigation, and the student shall have the right to be accompanied by a 'friend'. Another member of staff will Minute the meeting and the student shall receive a copy of the Minutes.

1.11 The Stage 1 outcome letter and the Stage 1 investigation report will normally be emailed to the student within **20 working days of submission of the Stage 1 complaint form**, unless a complex or prolonged investigation is required, in which case the complainant will be kept informed of the likely timescales.

1.12 If the staff member investigating the complaint upholds the complaint and recommends that the University should issue a remedy, the staff member investigating the complaint should receive approval from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning). The student should then be informed of when the appropriate remedy will be implemented.

1.13 The member of staff who completed the Stage 1 investigation shall send a copy of Stage 1 outcome letter and the Stage 1 investigation report to [studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk). The Student Complaints and Discipline Officer shall email the Stage 1 outcome letter and the Stage 1 investigation report to the complainant.

1.14 The Stage 1 outcome letter should include:

- the procedure(s) followed;
- whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- the remedy for the complaint, if the complaint is upheld or partially upheld;
- inform the student that they may request a review of the outcome at Stage 2.

The Stage 1 investigation report should include:

- A report of the complaint and the findings;
- Minutes of any interviews/meetings held to investigate the complaint;
- A copy of all evidence considered relating to the complaint;
- A copy of correspondence with the student, and any relevant emails between University staff.

1.15 The Stage 1 complaint and the response will be formally recorded, and anonymised details will be reported to the Student Experience Committee.

1.16 If the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 1 investigation or its outcome, they may wish to pursue the complaint at Stage 2 of the Procedure. If the student wishes to request a Stage 2 review of the complaint, they must submit a Stage 2 complaint form within **5 working days** of receiving the Stage 1 outcome letter and the Stage 1 investigation report.

## **Stage 2: Review stage**

2.1 If the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 1 investigation or its outcome, they may wish to pursue the complaint at Stage 2 of the Procedure.

2.2 If the student wishes to request a Stage 2 review of the complaint, they must email a Stage 2 complaint form (<https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/stdserv/Complaint-Form-Stage-2.pdf>) to [studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk) from their University email account within **5 working days** of receiving the Stage 1 outcome letter and the Stage 1 investigation report.

2.3 The complainant should also include:

- the Stage 1 outcome letter and Stage 1 investigation report
- a statement of why the complainant remains dissatisfied;
- details of the outcome the complainant is seeking.

2.4 The University Secretary (or his nominee) will review the complaint and determine:

- whether the Stage 1 outcome was reasonable in the circumstances;
- whether the relevant procedure(s) were followed;

- whether the student has been provided with clear reasons for the outcome of the complaint at Stage 1.
- consider any new information which the student was unable to provide for valid reasons earlier in the process; and
- consult as appropriate with a view to determining a suitable resolution of the complaint.

2.5 The Stage 2 review will not usually consider the issues afresh or involve a further investigation.

2.6 The University Secretary will submit a report to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), with a recommendation as to remedy, if appropriate. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor will issue the University's formal Stage 2 response to the complainant. A full response will normally be sent within **30 working days** of submission of the Stage 2 complaint, unless delay is unavoidable, in which case the complainant will be kept informed of the likely timescales.

2.7 In cases where the University Secretary has been involved at an earlier stage of the Procedure, the independent review at Stage 2 will be carried out by an alternative senior member of University staff.

2.8 The Stage 2 complaint and the response will be formally recorded, and anonymised details will be reported to the Student Experience Committee and the University Council.

2.9 Stage 2 of the Student Complaints Procedure concludes the University's procedures in relation to complaints, and the complainant will normally be issued with a Completion of Procedures Letter.

2.10 If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint it may be possible to apply for an external review of the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) providing that the complaint is eligible under the OIA's rules. Such an application must be received by the OIA within 12 months of the date of the University's Completion of Procedures letter.

### **3. Recording, reporting and learning from complaints**

3.1 Following the outcome of an upheld or partially upheld complaint, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) will be responsible for formally deciding what corrective action should be implemented, if any. This shall be reported annually to the Student Experience Committee. The report shall not identify the student and appropriate levels of confidentiality will be maintained.

3.2 Examples of corrective action may include, but is not limited to, a change to policy, process or practice and relevant staff training.

3.3 Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints shall be recorded and reported to the Student Experience Committee annually.

3.4 The following details will be recorded and reported:

- The complainant's programme and part of study

- The complainants age, gender, ethnicity and whether the complainant has a disability. The complainants name shall not be reported. If the student considers that this information may make them identifiable, at the request of the student this shall not be reported.
- Summary of the complaint, whether or not the complaint was upheld and the remedy to resolve the complaint where appropriate.