

# Guide to the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

## Introduction

The University is committed to providing a high quality service and encourages its students to raise issues where they have cause for concern.

We aim to handle those concerns in a way that:

- treats complaints with appropriate seriousness, sympathy and confidentiality
- encourages rapid and informal resolution
- is fair to all parties involved
- allows the University or a particular section or department to benefit and learn from the process.

This document outlines a number of straightforward processes that you should use if you have cause for concern. You can raise these concerns as an individual student, or as part of a listed group of students where this is appropriate, although one student should act as a spokesperson for the group. A copy of the policy statements that underpin this guidance document can be found at section 9 of the Handbook of Student Regulations on the University website on [www.port.ac.uk/studentregs](http://www.port.ac.uk/studentregs)

These processes are for the use of students registered with the University or who have left the University within the last three months where the event complained about happened during those three months. Applicants to the University should use the complaints procedure in the code of practice on admissions to raise any concerns.

Further information on the related subject of how to appeal is available in a separate leaflet, entitled Guide to the Appeals Process. The guide is available from your departmental office or from the Academic Registry.

We will ensure that you are not discriminated against or suffer any disadvantage as a result of raising genuine concerns, and we intend the procedures in this leaflet to help you to know that this is the case.

A friend or a student representative is welcome to accompany you to any meetings held during the process of dealing with your concerns.

If you make a frivolous or malicious complaint, however, we will deal with it seriously under the student disciplinary procedures.

We will treat any documentation associated with a complaint from yourself and other parties confidentially. However, if you make a complaint about a member of staff, they will be informed about the substance of the complaint so that they are in a position to make a response. The University will not investigate anonymous complaints.

Do remember that complaints will not always produce the outcome that you are seeking, as all points of view have to be considered. Whatever the decision, your concerns will receive serious consideration and if we are not able to resolve the problem we will advise you and explain the reasons for the decision. If your formal complaint is upheld, we will meet your reasonable expenses in making the complaint, up to a maximum of £50. We will need you to present an account of your expenses and all relevant receipts.

Finally, records of all formal complaints made to the University are kept in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and for the time period specified in the University of Portsmouth record retention scheme – six years after the last action on the case.

Anonymous details of the number of formal complaints received, the subject and outcomes of the complaints will be included in an annual report to the University senior management for quality purposes and equality monitoring.

## Getting advice

If you think something has gone wrong or someone has behaved inappropriately (see for example the policy on dealing with incidents of bullying and harassment or the code of student misconduct), then you probably need advice about your rights and whether your expectations are realistic. Our procedures are here to help you because we want to solve the problems wherever possible and to help you to achieve an acceptable outcome.

It is likely that the issue that you are concerned about relates to your course, so the first place to try to resolve those concerns is within your department.

### Your personal tutor or supervisor

Every student has a personal tutor, or if you are a research student, a supervisor. This member of staff may be the most appropriate person to contact if they are not involved in the issue that you are concerned about.

### Student representatives

If you would prefer to talk to another student about the issue and to get advice from them, or perhaps ask them to represent the issue on your behalf, you can talk to a student representative in confidence. All student representatives receive training on the complaints procedure as part of their role and therefore, have a good understanding of how the procedure works.

Contact details for your student representatives are available from your school or department office.

### The Students' Union (UPSU)

UPSU offers advice and support through the Education and Representation Officer and can provide you with their own leaflets on how to make a complaint or appeal against an academic decision. You can contact the Education and Representation Officer through the Student Centre on **023 9284 3634**.

### Your course leader

Course leaders are often the most appropriate people to contact if you have a problem with your course. Your course handbook should provide contact details, but you can also ask for an appointment through your school or department office.

### The Head of Department/School

Your course is located in a school or department and the Head has responsibility for students and staff associated with the school/department. However, formal complaints are normally referred to your Head of school or department for investigation, so whenever possible, it is best to raise informal concerns with someone else.

It is also possible that your concerns relate to matters not directly associated with your course, in which case you may wish to contact the following people:

### The Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre (ASDAC)

If your concerns relate to the lack of provision for any notified special needs you might have, you should raise the matter with the adviser at ASDAC with whom you have previously spoken. The Advisers at ASDAC are best placed to try to bring about the changes necessary and can be contacted on **023 9284 3462**.

# Complaints procedure

## The Section Head

Sometimes your problem will be with another department, perhaps about the service offered by a central department such as the Library, Academic Registry or Information Services. In this case, you should approach the department concerned and ask to talk to the Head of the department/section/service.

## Collaborative Programmes Registrar

If your course is provided in partnership with the University of Portsmouth, you may wish to discuss your concerns with a member of the Collaborative Programmes Team. The Senior Registrar in the University can be contacted on **023 9284 5119**. However, any complaints about a partner institute must always be addressed through the partner's own complaints procedure. The University can, in any case, only take action if the complaint relates to any (in)action of the University, rather than of the partner institution.

## The Complaints Officer, Academic Registry

The Complaints Officer is responsible for coordinating the complaints procedure and can provide advice on the best way to deal with your concerns. The Complaints Officer also collates information on complaints that have been received, to learn about any shared areas of concern and to ensure that complaints are resolved. The Complaints Officer can be contacted on **023 9284 3642**, or by email on **complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk**

## I have concerns I want to resolve – what do I do now?

The best way to resolve your concerns is to raise them informally as soon as possible with the member of staff most directly concerned. By the end of any discussions you should understand what will be done to remedy the situation.

We hope that the majority of your concerns can be dealt with at this informal level, as it is the quickest way to resolve problems and move on with your studies. We would also expect you to have tried to deal with your concerns when they first arose, rather than going straight to making a formal complaint. However, if you do not believe the proposed remedy is satisfactory, you have the right to make a formal complaint.

## I want to make a formal complaint – how do I do that?

You can make a formal complaint by completing the appeal/complaint form at the end of this guidance leaflet and providing further details in a letter within 20 working days of either the date of the event complained about or the date the informal process was completed, although if you can show good reason why you could not submit your complaint in this time, your complaint may still be accepted. You should send a hard copy of the form, with any supporting documents, to the Complaints Officer in the Academic Registry in University House. Your letter must include details of the steps taken to resolve matters locally and explain why you consider that they were unsuccessful.

The Complaints Officer will decide whether your complaint is valid or not. If your complaint is not valid, the Complaints Officer will return your complaint to you with suggestions of other ways in which you may be able to resolve the problem, if appropriate. If your complaint is valid, the Complaints Officer can, where the resolution to the complaint is straightforward, handle the case directly. Where the complaint or resolution is not straightforward though, the Complaints

Officer will forward academic complaints to the relevant Head of school or department, whilst complaints about services and facilities will be forwarded to the appropriate Head of service, for their investigation. The Complaints Officer will also send you written confirmation that your complaint is valid, the name of the person to whom the complaint has been forwarded, and the date by which you should expect a reply.

The Head to whom your complaint is sent will investigate the matter him/herself. The investigation should be completed within 30 working days of the date on which your complaint was judged to be valid by the Complaints Officer. However, if an extension to this deadline is necessary you will be given the reasons for this and a new completion date.

You may be accompanied by a friend or a student representative for support and advice during the meeting.

Once the investigation is complete, you will receive a draft written report of findings and conclusions, including proposals for action to remedy your complaint, where appropriate. You will have five working days in which to comment on any material inaccuracies in the draft report, but you will not be able to introduce any new evidence at this stage. A final report will be issued after the five working days taking into account any comments made by either party.

If you make a complaint and for a good reason (illness, unavoidable absence) are not able to take part in some aspect of the procedures then you may nominate someone else to make the case on your behalf. Alternatively, we may be able to postpone the process until you are able to participate.

## I don't think my complaint was handled properly – can I request a review?

Yes, you can request a review of the response to your complaint or the way in which it was

handled, which will be carried out by the University Secretary. You must request this review within ten working days of the date of the report of findings or of the date by which the report should have been issued. You must state clearly why you feel that a review of your complaint is appropriate. Correspondence for the University Secretary should be addressed to: University Secretary, Directorate, University House, Winston Churchill Avenue, Portsmouth PO1 2UP.

The University Secretary will decide whether or not to proceed with a review, based on your reasons for wanting a review. If a review is justified, the University Secretary will agree with you the scope of the review. Either the University Secretary or someone appointed by him/her will carry out the review within 30 working days. The University Secretary will supply you with a copy of the findings and conclusions of the review, including any recommendations for actions to resolve your complaint.

## What if I am still not happy with the outcome of my complaint?

If you believe your complaint has still not been resolved properly after the University Secretary's review, you can apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE) for an independent review. The OIAHE handles individual complaints against higher education institutions once a student has exhausted the institution's own complaints procedures.

Leaflets on the work of the OIAHE and Scheme Application forms are available from the Complaints Officer in University House or on the OIAHE website at [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk). The OIAHE can also be contacted on 0118 959 9813 or by letter at the Fifth Floor, Thames Tower, Station Road, Reading RG1 1LX.



**Can I withdraw my complaint?**

You can withdraw a complaint at any time during the internal procedures by giving notice to either the Complaints Officer or to the Head to whom your complaint was referred. Once you have withdrawn your complaint the matter is closed.

If, however, you withdraw a complaint and then decide to make the same complaint at a later date, it is unlikely that the later complaint will be treated seriously unless there are extenuating circumstances. Our aim is to resolve difficulties at the time wherever possible.

**I study online and rarely visit the University to make a complaint**

It is not necessary to be resident at the University to make a complaint. You can still use the process set out above. The complaints form at the end of this booklet can be printed out for completion, and sent to the Complaints Officer in the Academic Registry or completed and submitted electronically from [www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/academicregistry/filetodownload,44223,en.doc](http://www.port.ac.uk/accesstoinformation/policies/academicregistry/filetodownload,44223,en.doc)

Once your complaint form has been received, any discussions or interviews can be held over the telephone if you do not want to, or cannot, attend the University. Please remember that if your complaint is upheld, we will reimburse your reasonable expenses up to a maximum of £50. The outcome of your complaint will be put in writing to you by post and by email, if appropriate, to ensure you receive it.

**I am registered for an award of the University but with a partner institution – who do I make my complaint to?**

You may be studying with us as part of a collaborative programme but you still have the right to complain about any matters affecting your studies. You must always try to resolve your complaint by use of the partner institution’s own complaints procedure.

The University can only investigate any part of a complaint that relates to any (in)action by the University itself and cannot question the academic judgement of the partner institution.

**My concerns relate to someone not directly employed by the University**

If you have concerns about a third party, for example, a contractor working on behalf of the University, please contact the Complaints Officer for advice on how to pursue your complaint. The Complaints Officer may be able to find out if the third party has a complaints procedure of their own to follow.

**Accessibility statement**

The student complaints procedure is designed to be accessible to all students. If you have any special needs that mean you are unable to use the complaints procedure in the way set out above, please contact the Complaints Officer on **023 9284 3642** or at [complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk](mailto:complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk) to discuss how the process can be adjusted to fit your needs.

This guide is also available in alternative formats. For more details, please contact the Complaints Officer.

**Finally**

If you still have questions about this complaints procedure, please do not hesitate to contact the Complaints Officer in the Academic Registry on **023 9284 3642** or at [complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk](mailto:complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk)

**CONFIDENTIAL**  
Student complaint/appeal form

**Part A – Student to complete**

Student Registration No:	Address to which the outcome of this process should be sent: ..... ..... .....
Family Name:	Postcode: ..... Tel: ..... Email: .....
Forename(s):	Unit affected (if applicable)
Course (or Study Route) and year/level:	Artefact affected (if applicable)
Type of complaint: ..... OR Grounds of appeal: ..... Details of previous attempts to resolve the complaint: .....	
Evidence of complaint/appeal: .....	
Your preferred outcome: .....	
Student signature ..... Date ... / ... / ...	
Did you approach anyone for help in making this complaint? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
If yes, was it:	a student representative? <input type="checkbox"/> Education and Representation Officer, UPSU? <input type="checkbox"/> the University Complaints Officer? <input type="checkbox"/> your course tutor? <input type="checkbox"/> someone else? <input type="checkbox"/>

University of Portsmouth  
Academic Registry  
University House  
Winston Churchill Avenue  
Portsmouth PO1 2UP  
United Kingdom

T: (023) 9284 3642  
F: (023) 9284 3082  
E: [complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk](mailto:complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk)  
W: [www.port.ac.uk](http://www.port.ac.uk)