



Student Complaints Procedure

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Version History

Version	Approved by	Revisions made	Date
1	Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer		03/02/2025
2	Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer	Addition of Section 6 on Compensation	28/08/2025

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The University is dedicated to ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education which is underpinned by a distinctive and exceptional student experience. However, the University recognises that despite its best efforts, sometimes it may get something wrong. The University welcomes the opportunity to put things right, and the student complaint policy and supporting procedure is one of the ways the University can consider students concerns and correct any mistakes.

2. Scope

- 2.1 The University considers a student complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction raised by a student (or group of students) against a service, facility or the academic provision of the University.
- 2.2 A student is eligible to raise a complaint under this procedure if they are either a student registered on a University of Buckingham course or were a student registered on a University of Buckingham course and have left or graduated within the 3 months prior to lodging the complaint.
- 2.3 Where the complaint involves a group of students, all correspondence must be handled by one designated student representative.
- 2.4 Complaints relating to the following areas have separate policies and procedures:
- Seeking a review of a decision about student progression, assessment or awards. ([Academic Appeals](#))
 - Behaviour of another student ([Student Non-Academic Misconduct Policy and Disciplinary Procedures](#))
 - Seeking a review or reconsideration of the outcome from an application decision ([Applicant Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedure](#))
 - Behaviour of a member of staff ([Disciplinary Policy](#))
 - [Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy and Procedures](#)
 - Public Interest Disclosure ([Whistleblowing Policy](#))
 - Complaints relating to collaboration or partner institution provision, should the Institutional Agreement allow, will be managed in accordance with the collaboration or partner institution's procedures, unless the complaint being raised relates to a service being provided directly to the student by the University.
- 2.5 Where a complaint is submitted that would be more appropriately considered under another policy or procedure, the student will be advised accordingly by the Student Casework Team.
- 2.6 Complaints lodged by third parties or anonymous complaints will not be considered.
- 2.7 The University may decline to consider a student complaint where the matters raised have already been considered through another University procedure.

3. Support and reasonable adjustment

- 3.1 There are various groups that can provide support and advice to students considering making a student complaint. These include:
- Personal Tutor, Subject Tutor, Programme Director or Research Supervisor
 - Dean



- Wellbeing Skills and Diversity
- The Student's Union
- Student Casework Team

3.2 Any student wishing to make a complaint who has a confirmed disability, specific learning difficulty, and/or mental health condition may request reasonable adjustments. Any adjustments will be relevant to the student's disability and/or their specific learning disability and may involve additional external support. If a student believes they would need reasonable adjustments, they should inform the Student Casework Office at the earliest opportunity.

4. Principles

4.1 Complaints will be dealt with in a timely, transparent and fair manner.

4.2 All parties involved in a complaint are required to act reasonably and fairly towards each other and to respect the University procedures.

4.3 Complaints will be investigated objectively and independently. The standard of proof in the investigation of complaints is the balance of probabilities, that is, that the matters alleged in the complaint can be shown as more likely than not to be true.

4.4 All complaints will be dealt with promptly with any time-critical factors made known to the investigator taken into consideration.

4.5 There are three stages to the student complaint procedure, and it is expected that each stage is exhausted before the complaint can move to the next stage. The complainant will need to provide evidence that the previous stage has been exhausted.

4.6 Time limits should usually be met by all parties. Complaints will normally be concluded at Stage 2 within 30 working days of receipt of the complaint form, and at stage 3 within 10 working days of receipts of the appeal form. However, the length of time required to consider the complaint will be dependent on the nature and complexity of the complaint. Therefore, if it is anticipated that the process will take longer than the time limits outlined in this document, all parties will be informed in writing and provided with amended timeframes.

4.7 Confidentiality will be maintained by all parties involved, except where it is necessary to disclose information to carry out a fair investigation. It is therefore expected that as standard:

- The subject of a complaint, be that an individual or department of the University, will receive a copy of the complaint in order to respond to the concerns being raised.
- The complainant and subject will both be informed of the outcome of a complaint.
- Third parties will be consulted if, in the opinion of the investigator, their views or opinions may be relevant to the investigation of a complaint.

4.7 No student will be disadvantaged, penalised or victimised as a result of making a complaint. However, if it materialises that the complaint was malicious or vexatious, the University may consider disciplinary procedures.



- 4.8 The University may decline to consider a Complaint where the matters in dispute are currently being considered or have been decided by an external body, such as the OIA.

5 Procedure

5.1 Stage 1 – Local Resolution

- 5.1.1 In most cases, when an issue or concern arises, it is possible for it to be resolved locally through discussion with a member of staff in the department concerned.
- 5.1.2 Issues must be raised as soon as possible and at the latest within one month of the matter occurring.
- 5.1.3 If students are unsure who to address concerns to, they may contact their Personal Tutor, Subject Tutor, Programme Director (taught students) or Research Supervisor (research students); if they have a concern about their accommodation, this can be discussed with a Residential Assistant or the Accommodation Office.
- 5.1.4 Students are advised to keep a record of any contact with staff.

5.2 Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

- 5.2.1 If a student's concerns remain unaddressed after the Stage 1 local resolution, or if a resolution was not possible due to the complexity or seriousness of the case, the student can submit the complaint for a formal investigation at Stage 2 of the process.
- 5.2.2 The Student Complaints Form ([Regulations Handbook](#), Section 5.5b) must be completed and submitted to the Student Casework Officer (student-complaints@buckingham.ac.uk), together with (i) any evidence that directly supports the complaint and (ii) evidence of action taken under Stage 1 of this procedure.
- 5.2.3 The Student Complaint Form must be submitted as soon as possible and at the latest within three months of when the matter occurred.
- 5.2.4 The Student Casework Office will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days.
- 5.2.5 The Student Casework Office will check the eligibility of the complaint to ensure that the *Student Complaints Procedure* is applicable. If the complaint is eligible an investigation will be initiated. If the complaint is ineligible or a different process would be more appropriate, the student will be notified of this.
- 5.2.6 The complaint will be investigated by an appropriate member of staff who will not have been previously involved in the complaint. They will take any steps they consider necessary to investigate, including calling on any person to provide specialist assistance.
- 5.2.7 The Investigator will usually send details of a complaint to anyone who is the subject of the complaint and they will have up to 5 working days to respond and provide any supporting evidence.



- 5.2.8 The Investigator may invite the student or any other relevant party to a meeting to discuss the complaint. Notes of the meeting will be taken. Any student invited to a meeting may be accompanied by a fellow registered student or a member of staff.
- 5.2.9 The investigator will usually complete their investigation, make a decision and send you a decision letter **within 30 working days** of receipt of the Student Complaints Form. If the time limit is extended, the Student Casework team will keep you updated about the progress of the investigation.
- 5.2.10 In the decision letter the investigator will explain what steps have been taken and set out the decision, including the reasons for the decision and any directions and/or recommendations.

5.3 Stage 3 - Review

- 5.3.1 If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 formal consideration of their complaint, they have the right to ask for a review of the decision on one or more of the following grounds:
- a. There was a procedural irregularity or error in the investigation.
 - b. The decision was objectively unreasonable (the student must identify which aspects of the decision they consider to be objectively unreasonable and explain why).
 - c. The student has material evidence which the investigator has not yet seen, for which the student has valid reasons for not providing earlier.
- 5.3.2 The Student will need to complete the Student Complaints Request for Review form ([Regulations Handbook](#), Section 5.5c) and submit it to the Student Casework team (student-complaints@buckingham.ac.uk) **within 10 working days** of the date of the outcome letter provided at Stage 2 of this procedure.
- 5.3.3 The review will be conducted by a Reviewer who will be a senior member of staff within the University who will not have been previously involved in the complaint.
- 5.3.4 The Reviewer will conduct the review only on the grounds listed above; they will not consider the issues afresh or carry out a further investigation.
- 5.3.5 The Reviewer will usually reach a decision and send a decision letter **within 10 working days** of receiving the Student Complaint Request for Review form. The decision letter will set out the Reviewer's decision and the reasons for that decision. If the time limit is extended, the Student Casework team will keep the student updated about the progress of the investigation.
- 5.3.6 If the Reviewer rejects the review request, the student will have reached the end of the University's procedures and the decision letter will be a Completion of Procedures letter.
- 5.3.7 If the Reviewer upholds the review request, the student will be informed that the matter has been referred back to Stage 2 of the procedure. Where the refer back is due to new evidence, the Investigator who considered the Stage 2 complaint will consider this new evidence. For all other reasons for a refer back, an Investigator who has not previously been involved in the complaint will then reconsider the complaint in light of the Reviewer's decision. This may involve further investigation.



At the end of this investigation the student will have reached the end of the University's procedures and the decision letter will be a Completion of Procedures letter.

- 5.3.8 A Completion of Procedures letter will set out the decision, including the reasons for the decision and will state that the student has the right to seek review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) and the time limit for doing so.

6. Compensation

- 6.1 Compensation in respect of successful complaints is considered by the Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer (or delegate) and applicable Dean on a case-by-case basis and awarded, without prejudice, in accordance with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's *Putting Things Right* Leaflet (February 2019).

7. Responsibility

7.1 *All students*

- 7.1.1 All students within scope of this policy are responsible for:
- Making themselves familiar with the Student Complaints Procedure, and ensuring each stage of the procedure is exhausted before moving to the next stage.
 - Explaining clearly and precisely what the concern/issue or problem is and what outcome they are seeking from the Complaints Procedure.
 - Providing evidence in support of their complaint in a timely manner and within the timeframes of the complaints process.
 - Ensuring that any evidence not written in English is translated and provided at the same time as the complaint paperwork.
 - Engage fully and appropriately with any request made reasonably by the Investigator and with the complaint investigation process.

7.2 *All staff*

- 7.2.1 All staff should be aware and make themselves familiar with the Student Complaints Procedure.
- 7.2.2 When a student complaint has been made about a service, facility or the academic provision of the University, the staff who have been involved with said service, facility or academic provision will be asked to provide commentary on the matters being raised and to provide any supporting evidence. All staff asked to provide this information are responsible for:
- Providing a detailed and, where possible, factual response.
 - Ensuring there is a response for each concern raised in the student complaint which is applicable to the service, facility or academic provision they were involved with.
 - Providing any relevant evidence.
 - Responding promptly and meeting all timeframes

7.3 *Deputy Head of Academic Services (Compliance and Casework)*



7.3.1 They are responsible for:

- Overseeing reviews and updates of the Student Complaints Procedure and supporting documentation to ensure the process complies with OIA expectations and meets student needs.
- Appointing Investigators and Reviewers.
- Ensuring compliance with the Student Complaints Procedure for all student complaints eligible under this procedure.
- Monitoring casework in terms of timeframes and outcomes to ensure consistent decision making.

7.3.2 The Deputy Head of Academic Services (Compliance and Casework) oversees the Student Casework Team. Any of the responsibilities of the Deputy Head of Academic Services (Compliance and Casework) as described in this procedure can be delegated to another member of the Student Casework Team.

7.4 *Dean/Director/Head of Department/Line Manager*

7.4.1 They are responsible for supporting, or arranging for support to be provided to, any member of staff who has been asked to provide a response to a student complaint.

7.5 *Investigator/Reviewer*

7.5.1 The appointed Investigator or Reviewer is responsible for:

- Undertaking a thorough, fair and prompt investigation into the concerns raised by the student in line with the expectations of the student complaint procedure.
- Raising any concerns about conflicts of interest as soon as noted, such as having any involvement in any capacity with the student raising the complaint.
- Undertaking periodic training.

8. Definitions

<i>Complainant</i>	is a Student who completes and submits a complaint to student-complaints@buckingham.ac.uk
<i>Complaint Form</i>	is the Student Complaints Form (Regulations Handbook , Section 5.5b).
<i>COP</i>	Completion of Procedures letter (COP) is a letter which the University will send to a complainant when the complainant has reached the end of the University's internal processes for complaints and where there is no further avenue for the complainant internally to pursue a Complaint.
<i>Investigation Report</i>	is a report of the outcome of investigation by an Investigator (stage 2).
<i>Investigator</i>	is a person selected and appointed to investigate complaint (stage 2).
<i>OIA</i>	Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education is an independent body set up to review students complaints about higher education

	providers in England and Wales.
<i>Reviewer</i>	is an Investigator who had been appointed to review an Investigation Report (Stage 3).
<i>Review Report</i>	is a Reviewer's report of a Review (Stage 3).
<i>Service</i>	is a Student's experience of the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the University.
<i>Stage 1 - Local Resolution</i>	is a review of a complaint in a Complaint Form that is conducted by an appropriate person in a college, academic department, administrative or support service.
<i>Stage 2 – Formal Investigation</i>	is the investigation of a complaint by an Investigator
<i>Stage 3 – Review</i>	is a review of an Investigation Report conducted by a Reviewer.
<i>Student</i>	means a currently registered student or student who has left the University within the preceding 3 months.
<i>Subject</i>	is the person or department of the University who or which is the subject of a complaint.
<i>Third Party</i>	is any party who is not a student or a member of the University community.