



STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

OUR APPROACH TO FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

We aim to ensure that all our students have the opportunity to benefit from their studies and other opportunities offered. We welcome feedback on how we are doing and understand that occasionally something can go wrong or you may not be satisfied with an aspect of your experience. Where this is the case, we would encourage you to let us know as soon as possible so that we can work with you to try to put it right quickly and make improvements for you and other students.

OVERVIEW OF FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

We welcome feedback from our students at any time but realise that there may be occasions when you want to complain about your experience. It is important that, in the first instance, complaints are raised directly with the relevant area of the University so we can try to resolve issues quickly at a local level. However, we understand that sometimes an agreement cannot be reached informally. If you have tried to resolve a matter informally but this has not worked you may submit a formal complaint.

Stage One formal complaints are investigated by Heads of Admissions or their nominee. If at the end of *Stage One* you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you can request a review of the decision via *Stage Two*.

The feedback and complaints procedure is outlined below:

1. Feedback

We welcome student views and opinions as they show us where we are doing something well or help us to identify where we might improve. In most cases providing feedback will not be the same as submitting a complaint and may be a suggestion on how you feel something could be done better. We encourage students to be involved as much as possible to help us improve their learning and teaching experience and the services we offer.

Here are some of the opportunities you can take to provide us with feedback:

- Direct communication (face-to-face, by email, or by telephone)
- Via your Personal Supervisor / Tutor
- Student Staff Committees (SSCs)
- Module evaluations



- Student satisfaction surveys
- Academic reviews

2. **Attempt to resolve issues informally**

We treat something as a complaint if you tell us you are not satisfied with the standard of service we provide or with something we have done or have not done. We ask you try to **resolve a complaint directly, informally and as soon as possible with the person or service concerned.**

This should preferably be done in person, but can also be via email, or phone, explaining clearly what the problem is and how you would like it to be resolved.

We expect staff to listen to your concerns and try to resolve them in a reasonable and quick way. However, we understand that it can sometimes be difficult to raise a complaint directly with the member of staff concerned. If you are in this position, please contact our Legal Counsel who can support you in raising the issues and, if appropriate, suggest another member of staff for you to contact.

Our Legal Counsel office is tasked with the responsibility of overseeing that our organisation complies with all aspects, including the raising of any complaints. These complaints will be treated with the strictest of confidence and our Legal Counsel office will handle the matter in an amicable, professional and relational manner at all times.

3. **Formal complaints – Stage One consideration**

If your attempt to resolve your concerns informally has not been successful you may submit a formal complaint.

You must submit a formal complaint within three months of the matter. If a complaint is submitted after this time we will normally tell you that it is out of time and it will not be considered unless you can give us clear documentary evidence that shows you were prevented from submitting your complaint earlier.

How to submit a Stage One Complaint

You should submit your completed complaint form with any supporting documents to the Legal Counsel office at noel.frost@ocrpl.org. Please ensure that you complete the form as required and do not send a statement or letter of complaint, as this helps us to process your complaint more effectively.



Whenever possible, please send any supporting evidence with your complaint form, so the investigation into your complaint is not delayed. You should write and submit your complaint yourself but if you need some help to do this you can get in touch with the Head of Admissions, who will assist you.

If you are submitting a complaint as part of a group, each of you should submit a form, but it is fine for the content of each form to be the same as you are all referring to the same matter of concern. Please indicate in the relevant section of the form that your complaint is a group complaint and name one of you to act as lead contact.

The preferred format for completed complaint forms and evidence is Microsoft Word document or PDF. Other acceptable file types are .jpg, .gif, and .zip. For .zip folders please follow the preferred naming conventions for the files within them. If the respective office you are filing the complaint with is unable to open a file or its readability is compromised, you will be asked to resend the file in a different format.

If you are submitting multiple files of evidence it is helpful if the file names are numbered sequentially. This will avoid confusion when your complaint is considered. The Legal Counsel office will combine your complaint into a single PDF file but if you have the appropriate application you may prefer to do this yourself.

What happens next?

We will acknowledge your complaint and explain how it will be handled. It will be referred to the relevant *Stage One* senior officer who will either start an investigation or appoint an investigating officer to do the investigation on their behalf.

The *Stage One* senior officer may ask you to provide further information or invite you to a meeting to discuss your complaint. We will make every effort to provide you with an outcome within 28 calendar days but this is not always possible. If the consideration of your complaint takes longer we will explain why and let you know when we expect to send the outcome to you. As soon as the investigation is finished the *Stage One* senior officer will send you a written outcome, usually via email.

Stage One Outcomes

The *Stage One* outcome will explain:

- How your complaint was investigated;
- Whether your complaint has been upheld or dismissed, with reasons for this decision;



- If your complaint is upheld, whether we are offering any practical or financial remedy;
- The outcome will also tell you that in certain circumstances you have the right to request that your complaint is reviewed at *Stage Two*. It will explain the grounds for requesting such a review, the procedure to follow and the deadline for submitting a *Stage Two* complaint.

4. Formal complaints – Stage Two consideration

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the *Stage One* consideration of a complaint, you may request a review of the decision via *Stage Two*.

Your complaint must have been considered at *Stage One* before it can proceed to *Stage Two*.

Reviews can only be considered on one or more of the following grounds:

- there is evidence of procedural irregularity in the *Stage One* consideration of the matter;
- there is new evidence which, for an acceptable reason, was not submitted at *Stage One*;
- there is evidence previously available at *Stage One* which requires further consideration.

Normally the review stage does not consider the issues raised afresh or involve further investigation. For this reason, if you are simply unhappy with the outcome at *Stage One* this will not in itself be an acceptable reason for requesting a review the decision.

How to submit a *Stage Two* Complaint

If you wish to request a review of a *Stage One* outcome you must complete a *Stage Two Complaint Form* and submit it to the Academic Registrar within 28 days of the conclusion of the stage one consideration.

We will not usually consider review requests which are submitted after the deadline you are given.

What happens next?



The Academic Registrar will nominate a *Stage Two* senior officer who was not involved in the original consideration of your complaint to undertake a review of the issues you raise.

The *Stage Two* senior officer will consider the following questions:

- Were the relevant procedures followed during *Stage One*?
- Was the outcome reasonable in all the circumstances?
- Have clear reasons been given explaining why the complaint was rejected at the formal stage?
- If new material evidence has been provided, have valid reasons been given for not supplying this earlier?

The *Stage Two* senior officer may then conclude:

- That your review request does not demonstrate eligible grounds and dismiss your complaint; or
- that eligible grounds of review have been demonstrated and that your complaint may be resolved through the offering of a remedy; or
- that eligible grounds of review have been demonstrated and your complaint may be referred for further consideration by a complaint panel.

If you are offered a remedy but do not wish to accept it, then your complaint will be referred to a complaint panel.

Complaint Panel

A *Stage Two* complaint panel it will have the following membership:

- The *Stage Two* senior officer who initially reviewed the complaint (who acts as Chair);
- A Co-Dean of the organisation (for a complaint about an academic matter) or a *Stage One* senior officer (for a complaint about a non-academic matter) without prior involvement in your complaint;
- Another senior member of staff of the organisation without prior involvement in your complaint.

We will arrange a meeting of the panel and you will be invited to attend either in person or via skype. You will be given 21 calendar days' notice of the date of the meeting and can choose to ask a friend or representative to attend with you, but no legal representation is permitted at this stage.

Before the panel meets we will send you and all others attending a copy of the paperwork. This will include the procedure to be followed and details of those attending (including the names of any witnesses).



If there is a good reason you cannot attend the panel meeting (hearing) you can request a 'paper-based consideration'. For a 'paper-based consideration' no hearing is held but we collect written submissions from everyone and send a copy to you.

Once these have been sent to you we will give you 14 days to submit a further written response if you wish to do so. The panel will then meet to consider its decision regarding the complaint in your absence.

The decision of the Chair to permit a 'paper' hearing will be final. The outcome of the *Stage Two* Panel will be sent to you in writing, normally 7 calendar days after the date of the panel meeting. This marks the end of our consideration of your complaint.

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR (OIA)

Following the conclusion of your complaint at *Stage Two*, you will also be issued with a 'Completion of Procedures Letter' and if you believe that the organisation's complaint process has been conducted incorrectly or you feel that the outcome is unreasonable in relation to the evidence, then you have the right to raise the matter for external and independent review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

Information about the process is available on the Office of the Independent Adjudicator website.

COMPLAINT EXPECTATIONS

We will handle complaints in a sensitive and appropriate way and expect that those submitting a complaint will also act reasonably.

We may discontinue the complaints procedure if we consider that a complaint is being conducted in an unreasonable or vexatious way.