



## Ulster University Student Complaints Procedure

### Introduction

We are committed to providing a high-quality student experience to all of our students from enrolment to graduation. While we hope that you are satisfied with the experience that we offer we realise that sometimes there are things that fall short of what you expect, and we would welcome the opportunity to improve them.

If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with what we are providing, please tell us – you should feel free to raise matters of concern without the risk of disadvantage.

The Student Academic Affairs Team (SAAT) is the team responsible for co-ordinating and managing student complaints in Ulster University.

### Who can complain

**You must be a current student or recent graduate of the University (you can use the procedure for 6-months following graduation or exiting the University).**

Third parties such as parents, friends, spouses, sponsors or employers may not normally raise a concern/complaint **on behalf of a student**. If there is a reason (such as disability or mental health) where a family member or friend needs to progress a complaint on behalf of a current student (or within 6-months of that student leaving the University) a third-party consent form must be completed and submitted by the student who is making the complaint, to verify permission is granted, specifying who is able to act on their behalf. To obtain a third-party consent form, please email [studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk).

You can complain as an individual student, or we will also accept complaints from groups of students.

### What can I complain about

The Procedure can be used to complain about any aspect of the academic or other services provided by the University.

*It does not however cover the following categories of complaint: -*

- *grievances relating to personal harassment or discrimination on sexual, religious, racial or other grounds*
- *requests for reviews of academic decisions*



- *complaints relating to the Students' Union*
- *appeals against decisions taken under disciplinary proceedings*
- *complaints about businesses operating on University premises but not owned by the University.*

**Separate procedures exist to cover these categories of complaint- please look at the following information to help with these issues [click here:](#)**

### Advice

You may wish to seek help or advice from Officers of the Students' Union, or staff in Student Wellbeing, the Campus Student Support Office or your Studies Advice or Year Tutor, before making a complaint.

To discuss whether the Complaints Procedure is the most appropriate pathway to use, please contact [studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk), and a member of the Student Academic Affairs Team (SAAT) will arrange to meet and discuss this with you.

You have the right to be accompanied by a member of the University for support at any stage in the procedure (for example, a student or member of staff).

## COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

**The procedure comprises three stages.** Should the University not be able to satisfactorily resolve your complaint, you have the right to take the complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman (NIPSO), but for NIPSO to take a complaint you must have closed out all stages of the internal University complaints procedure.

Please note that SAAT is the University team that is responsible for co-ordinating and managing student complaint.

### *Affiliate Students*

However, if you are a student studying with one of Ulster University's Partners (QAHE, COMD, UCQ etc.), as an affiliate student, then SAAT will work with the relevant Partnership Managers, Quality Managers and the Associate Dean (AQSE) for Partnerships, to investigate and resolve complaints at a local level for students studying with Ulster partners. As an affiliate student please use the links below to the forms GCF/CS-1 and CS-2 forms below to bring a complaint to Ulster University's SAAT.



### *Associate Students*

Associate students (those who are registered with a different education provider, but who are studying on an Ulster University accredited HE qualification – e.g., through the Northern Ireland Regional Colleges) will use their own institutions complaints procedure to complete Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the process, and then have the right to bring your complaint to Ulster University, through the SAAT, for a Stage 3 Complaints Panel, if your institution has not been able to satisfactorily resolve your complaint. For this process, please ask your college/provider for their own complaint procedure and forms, and should you wish to progress a complaint (once the college/providers own process has been closed out) please use the CS-2 form linked below.

**Stage 1:** allows for informal/early resolution.

**Stage 2:** enables a more in-depth investigation to take place, where either Stage 1 has been unsuccessful in satisfactorily resolving the complaint, or where the complaint is of a more serious or complex nature, which could not be resolved informally, the complaints procedure may start at the Stage 2 level.

**Stage 3:** involves the convening of an Ulster University Complaints Panel.

The Student Academic Affairs Team (SAAT) are the team responsible for managing all student complaints and can be contacted via [studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk) complaints or on [saat@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:saat@ulster.ac.uk) if you have a general query.

### **Stage 1: Early/Informal Resolution**

We aim to resolve complaints quickly, and appropriately, as early in the process as possible. This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong and immediate action to resolve the problem. Where possible you should raise your concerns with the relevant staff member/University Team of Service Provider. This can be done face-to-face, by phone, in writing or by email. If however you don't feel able to approach a specific staff member or service directly, you can complete the general complaints form, or email [studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk) to request that SAAT progress your complaint.

If SAAT manages your Stage 1 complaint, then we will give you our decision (findings and outcome/s) at Stage 1 in ten (10) working days, from when the complaint is actioned. If you are not satisfied with the response, we give at this stage you can take your complaint to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure.

Alternatively, if your complaint is more complex and it is clear that it will not be possible to reach a conclusion within ten (10) working days you may take your complaint immediately to Stage 2 without using Stage 1.



To make a Stage 1 complaint you can email [studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk), or you can use this [general complaints form \(GCF\)](#).

## Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint

- a) those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and
- b) those that are more complex and require more detailed investigation and consideration.

We have a form – [the CS-1 Form](#) - which will help you to state your complaint clearly. If you complete this form and send it, it will automatically go to the Student Academic Affairs Team, who will initiate an investigation and liaise with the faculty/department to provide you with an answer to the issues that you raise.

Please be aware that the complaint form and any supporting documents that you may want to provide will be seen by the person investigating your complaint, and potentially by anyone named in the complaint/relevant staff in the department (s) being complained about.

Staff members who have been asked to investigate a complaint under stage 1, and who feel that it requires more detailed investigation, may also refer the complaint to Stage 2 if they believe this is appropriate.

At Stage 2 we will:

- Acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three (3) working days of receipt of the CS-1 form.
- Discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied (if you completed Stage 1), or ask for clarification on what the issue/s are and what remedy or response you are looking for, and notify you when your complaint is being actioned

and

- Give you a full response to the complaint as soon as possible and not later than fifteen (15) working days from the date the complaint is actioned. If the investigation is likely to take longer than fifteen (15) working days we will tell you. We will agree revised time limits with you and keep you updated on progress.



### Stage 3: Complaints Panel

If you are still dissatisfied with outcome of the investigation you can ask to have your complaint heard by a student complaints panel. To request that your Stage 2 complaint progresses to Stage 3 you need to complete and submit the [CS-2 Form](#). This form will be sent directly to SAAT once you press send.

The panel will aim to meet within twenty (20) working days of receipt of the request for a panel hearing. If it is likely to take longer than 20 working days we will tell you and agree a revised timeframe with you.

The panel will consist of:

- a lay member of the University Council (who will normally Chair the panel)
- a Dean (Executive or Associate) of a Faculty not involved in the complaint,
- a Head of an Administrative/Non-Academic Department (Professional Services) not involved in the complaint and
- the President of the Students Union, or a nominated representative of the SU Executive Team.

The panel will want to meet with you and the other parties involved in complaint separately. You will have the right to be accompanied to this meeting by a member of the University (a fellow student, staff member, Student Wellbeing or Students Union Advice Team member). The panel will have available to it all documentation relating to the complaint. If you cannot attend the Stage 3 Complaints Panel meeting, you will be offered the opportunity to make a written submission for the panel, which must be submitted to SAAT at least three (3) working days in advance of the date of the panel meeting, so it can be uploaded to the Panel Papers folder.

The conclusions of the panel will be communicated to you in writing, by SAAT, within ten (10) working days of its meeting.

#### **What if I'm still dissatisfied?**

##### **The Public Services Ombudsman**

If you have exhausted the internal complaints procedures, and have completed Stage Three and remain dissatisfied, you can complain to the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman (NIPSO).

You must make your complaint to NIPSO within 6-months of the final decision from the University.

For further information on this procedure please see [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk).

#### **Further Information**



If you are unsure if your complaint falls within the scope of this procedure or if you require general advice on the most appropriate way to pursue your complaint, the Student Academic Affairs Team (SAAT) will be pleased to assist. You can contact them on

[studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@ulster.ac.uk)

or

[saat@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:saat@ulster.ac.uk)

or

**+44 (0) 28 7012 3838 (SAAT)**

You should note that SAAT can act in an advisory capacity only and will not comment on the validity or likely outcome of your complaint.

<a href="#">Link for Stage One (GCF) Form</a>	<a href="#">Link for Stage Two (CS-1) Form</a>	<a href="#">Link for Stage Three CS-2 Form</a>
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## CATEGORIES OF COMPLAINT DEALT WITH THROUGH OTHER PROCEDURES

Reason for/Nature of the Complaint	How this is managed in Ulster University
<p><b>Complaint about decisions relating to admissions or procedural aspects of the application and admissions process</b></p>	<p>The Admissions Complaints Procedure provides advice for applicants who feel that the decision relating to their application was unfair.                      Details of this procedure are available from the Academic Registry Offices.  <a href="https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/83019/Admissions-Complaints-Procedure-August-2021-V8.pdf/_nocache">https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/83019/Admissions-Complaints-Procedure-August-2021-V8.pdf/_nocache</a></p>
<p><b>Complaint about an academic decision (taught courses)</b></p>	<p>In certain circumstances you may request that the decision relating to academic progress taken by a Board of a Faculty, or a Board of Examiners be reviewed.                      Full details of the review of decisions procedures are available in the Student Handbook and at the following web address:  <a href="https://www.ulster.ac.uk/studentadministration/students/currentstudents/examinations/appeals">https://www.ulster.ac.uk/studentadministration/students/currentstudents/examinations/appeals</a></p>
<p><b>Complaint about an academic decision (research students)</b></p>	<p>A student whose studies, during their period of research, have been discontinued by the Research Degrees Committee, on the recommendation of the Board of Faculty in which they are registered, may ask for their case to be reviewed.</p> <p>A candidate for a Research Degree who is not deemed eligible for the degree for which they have been examined (and where they are not permitted to resubmit their thesis for that award) may ask for their case to be reviewed.</p> <p>Full details of the Procedures for the Review of Decisions are contained in the Research Studies Handbook, copies of which are available from the Research Office.                      Regulations for the MPhil and DPhil awards require that candidates who are asking for their case to be reviewed, following examination, should lodge a request in writing to the Research Office within one-month of the approval of the recommendation of the Board of Examiners.</p>



<p><b>Complaints relating to sexual, racial or religious harassment or discrimination</b></p>	<p>If you consider that you have been subject to harassment on the grounds of religious beliefs, political opinion, gender, marital status, having or not having dependants, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnic origin or age you should consult the University's Policy and Procedures on dealing with Bullying and Harassment (Dignity at Work).</p> <p>This summarises the University's policy in this area, lists people and organisations from whom you can seek advice and support and indicates how you can pursue any complaint of this nature. Copies of the policy can be obtained from the Students' Union, Student Support or online: <a href="https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/121162/DWSP-2017.pdf">https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/121162/DWSP-2017.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>Complaints about the services provided by the Students' Union or the Sports Union</b></p>	<p>In the first instance you should attempt to resolve the complaint informally with the person concerned or with the site Vice-President of the Students' Union. If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome you should write to the President of the Students' Union/Sports Union giving full details of the complaint and of the attempt/s you made to resolve it informally.</p>
<p><b>Complaints about the service provided by businesses not owned by the University but operating on University premises (e.g. banks and shops)</b></p>	<p>All such complaints should be made directly to the manager of the business concerned, or to the relevant Head Office. You may wish to send a copy of the complaint to SAAT for information, to make the University aware that you have made this complaint.</p>