

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

ADMISSIONS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1. Scope of the Procedure

This procedure is based on the principles underlying the University-wide Student Complaints Procedure, in that it allows for an informal stage, a formal appeal/complaint handled by the Head of Admissions, and finally an appeal to a Deputy Vice Chancellor. It covers all applicants to University credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing programmes, and thus can be invoked by persons who are not currently Ulster University students.

The procedure covers the following types of appeal/complaint:

- 1.1 complaints about the University's handling of a query or an application for admission;
- 1.2 allegations that admissions criteria were not applied correctly or even-handedly, or that the criteria applied were different from those previously notified to applicants;
- 1.3 allegations that admissions criteria were not applied correctly or even-handedly, were different from those previously notified to applicants or that reasonable and appropriate alternative measures of ability were not considered;
- 1.4 complaints that admissions criteria were not sufficiently transparent;
- 1.5 complaints relating to the outcome of a selection/admissions criteria;
- 1.6 complaints relating to transfer requests from another programme, or another institution.

The procedure does **not** cover:

- 1.7 strategic decisions relating to the overall size and shape of schools and faculties;
- 1.8 the existence of caps on student numbers in particular programmes, whether imposed by the University, government or professional bodies;
- 1.9 recruitment to research programmes (MPhil/PhD) – a separate procedure exists for these cases -
see https://www.ulster.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/152394/appeals.pdf

Any correspondence on 1.7 and 1.8 should be forwarded directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor who has overall responsibility for admissions.

In cases of collaborative provision, i.e. where a University programme is offered in partnership with another institution, responsibility for admissions decisions may vary according to the type of collaborative arrangement. However, in general when the admissions query relates to an Ulster validated programme taught at a partner institution, enquiries should be directed to the partner institution in the first instance. The admissions query may be directed to the University provided that the internal procedures of the partner institution have been exhausted.

2. Submission and Investigation of Enquiries/Complaints/ Appeals

2.1 First Stage: Informal Resolution

Enquiries about admissions decisions should normally be made in writing by the applicant in question, and should be directed to the Admissions Service in the first instance. If necessary, Admissions staff will consult with relevant academic staff before responding to the query. A written response will be made to every written enquiry (i.e. by letter or email), normally within 10 working days, and this written response will mark the completion of the informal stage. If the complaint is submitted by an international student and the International Department has been involved in the decision, then International Admissions will liaise with the International Department at each stage in preparing a response.

2.2 Second Stage: Formal Letter to Head of Admissions

An applicant who is dissatisfied with the explanation offered should put his/her concerns in writing to the Head of Admissions, normally within 10 working days of receiving an unsatisfactory outcome. The formal letter to the Head of Admissions should set out the grounds for dissatisfaction with the initial response from the Admissions Service, and include any previous correspondence. The Head of Admissions shall then undertake such further enquiries as are deemed necessary before providing a written response, normally within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint. When a complaint is made about specific members of staff, those staff shall have the right to see copies of relevant documentation, to present evidence to the Head of Admissions, and to be informed of the outcome of the complaint/appeal.

2.3 Third Stage: Appeal

Any applicant still dissatisfied after the second stage may appeal in writing to the Deputy Vice Chancellor, normally at the campus in question and normally within 10 working days of receiving the Head of Admissions' decision. The appellant should forward copies of previous correspondence and any supporting documentation to the Deputy Vice Chancellor. The appellant shall normally have the right to meet the Deputy Vice Chancellor to present his/her appeal, and to be accompanied by a member of teaching staff from his/her present or former school or college. However, there will be no appeal hearing when, in the judgement of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, the admissions decision has resulted from the correct and impartial application of written criteria, e.g. when the appellant has clearly failed to achieve the

required grades for entry. In such cases, the Deputy Vice Chancellor shall communicate this decision in writing to the appellant, normally within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal.

3. Timescales

The timescales set out in this procedure relate to investigations carried out in semester-time only, and may not prove possible to meet at particularly busy periods for Admissions staff (e.g. August-September). However, the University will at all times strive to respond to enquiries as quickly as circumstances allow.

This policy applies to all complaints submitted to Stage 1 (Informal Resolution) on or after 1 August 2021.

4. Confidentiality and Enquiries from Third Parties

All parties to a complaint are expected to maintain strict confidentiality, both during and after any enquiry/appeal/complaint. Enquiries about admissions decisions should normally be made by the applicant in question. When an admissions decision is queried by a third party (e.g. a parent, or a school enquiring on behalf of a former pupil), the Admissions Service will normally be able to supply a generalised answer on admissions policy, but may be precluded from discussing individual cases by the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). However, a more detailed response may be given when the applicant expressly states that the third party is acting on his/her behalf.

5. Central Monitoring of Admissions Complaints/Appeals

The Admissions Service will prepare an annual summary of the nature and outcome of any formal admissions appeals/complaints for reporting to the Education Committee and onwards to Senate.