

Student Complaints and Resolution Policy

Effective from 1 September 2021

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out how student complaints about the University, specific members of staff, or the level of service or treatment they have received, will be handled.

It ensures that student complaints are dealt with fairly and promptly, and at the appropriate level, and should be read in conjunction with the [Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure](#).

2. What is covered by the policy?

This policy relates to complaints submitted by all students regarding the level of service or treatment they have received from the University. This includes complaints about specific staff members, Academic Units, or service areas.

For the avoidance of doubt, if for any reason there is a conflict between the Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure and the Student Complaints and Resolution Policy, the Student Complaints and Resolution Policy will take precedence.

This policy is **not** intended to address instances of student misconduct or specific academic decisions. If you report, or are being investigated in relation to, an allegation of student misconduct (whether academic or non-academic), this will be handled under the [Student Disciplinary Policy](#). If you wish to appeal against an academic decision (such as Personal Extenuating Circumstances or unsatisfactory progress decisions or Board of Examiners outcome), please follow the [Academic Queries and Appeals Procedure](#).

3. Roles and responsibilities

An Authorised Person (usually a Head of Academic Unit/Service, or their nominee) is responsible for considering and determining Level 1 informal complaints.

The Academic Registrar, or nominee, is the senior member of staff in the University with overall responsibility for ensuring a proper outcome for any student complaint.

The Complaint Officer has responsibility for processing submitted formal complaints to the University. The Complaint Officer is authorised to reach conclusions and provide an outcome on cases on matters that are deemed to be formal complaints.

The Chair of the Complaint Committee is responsible for considering and determining complaints which have been referred to them due to being particularly difficult or serious. The Chair of the Complaint Committee is normally a Pro-Vice Chancellor with no prior involvement in or close connection to the case. They may consider the complaint themselves

or may form a committee by appointing further independent colleagues with no prior involvement in or close connection to the case.

People Services are responsible for undertaking staff disciplinary investigations, if appropriate, following a complaint submission.

Student Complainants are responsible for ensuring that any complaints submitted to the University are done so in good faith. Although students will not be disadvantaged for lodging a complaint in good faith, where a complaint is found to be malicious or vexatious (for example, harassing, obsessive or repetitive complaints intended to cause disruption or offence), the University may investigate the Complainant under the [Student Disciplinary Procedure \(non-academic\)](#).

4. Policy

4.1. Fairness

All student complaints will be investigated thoroughly, fairly and within a reasonable timeframe.

The University will not normally investigate complaints made anonymously. In exceptional circumstances, where the University accepts that there is a compelling case supported by additional evidence, a complaint may be treated as confidential in nature (where the identity of the Complainant is known to the University but not disclosed to any responding parties).

The University will disclose relevant case documents to appropriate parties involved in the complaint.

Any student or colleague asked to give a statement or evidence to an investigation should ensure that they do so honestly and objectively. Failure to be honest may, of itself, be considered an act of misconduct.

4.2. Timeframes

Level 1 complaints should be submitted in writing to the appropriate Head of Academic Unit or Service **no more than 3 calendar months after the event** about which the complaint is made.

Level 2 complaints must be submitted to the Student Progress Service (via casework@ncl.ac.uk) **no more than 3 calendar months after the Level 1 Response** from the Academic Unit or Service or **no more than 6 calendar months after the event**.

The Level 3 request for review of the formal complaint outcome must be submitted in writing to casework@ncl.ac.uk **within 14 days of notification of the outcome of the Level 2 determination**.

Complaints or requests for review submitted after the time limits set out above will only be accepted for investigation where there is a compelling reason to justify the delay. The

Complainant will be informed in writing of any determination where a complaint or review request has not been made in time.

The Academic Registrar, or their nominee, is ultimately responsible for deciding whether to admit a complaint or review request submitted outside of the above timeframes.

4.3. Group Complaints

Where the issues raised in the complaint affect more than one student, a group complaint can be submitted. One student must be nominated as the group representative and will be responsible for liaising with the other students. The University will communicate directly with the nominated student only.

Where students have personal circumstances which require specific consideration, they should submit separate complaints which will be considered on an individual basis.

4.4. Confidentiality

All University colleagues and students involved in any complaint investigation have a duty of confidentiality to both the Complainant and the Responding parties. This means that all parties should refrain from discussing the case with anyone other than people who may be deemed to have a legitimate need to know.

The University should obtain the Complainant's consent for relevant colleagues to view any personal data provided in connection with their complaint. If the Complainant does not consent to the matter being investigated, no further action will be taken.

By signing the complaint and resolution form – or submitting it via your Newcastle University email account – you are giving permission for relevant colleagues with a legitimate business need to access your documentation.

If you do not wish for a particular member of staff to have access to your documents, you must ensure that this is made clear in your letter of complaint or during a complaint interview. However, please note that the University may be unable to conclude an investigation into your complaint if we are unable to seek a response from a key member of staff.

4.5. Related investigations

Where the Complainant is involved in another ongoing formal University investigation (for example: Assessment Irregularities, Student Disciplinary, Academic Appeals), the Academic Registrar, or nominee, will determine whether the complaint may proceed simultaneously.

Complaints about staff conduct will normally be investigated under Level 2 of the Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure, in collaboration with People Services. Any evidence or outcome resulting from the investigation will be considered separately by People Services. Parallel investigations about the same substantive matter will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, as determined by the Academic Registrar.

4.6. Appeals

Where a Complainant is unhappy with a Level 1 Complaint decision, they may submit a Level 2 formal complaint to casework@ncl.ac.uk for further impartial consideration.

A Complainant may appeal a Level 2 Complaint decision by submitting a request for review to the Academic Registrar (via casework@ncl.ac.uk), based on one or more of the following:

- Procedural irregularity;
- New material evidence that was previously unavailable;
- Unreasonable decision.

Decisions made by a Complaint Committee are final and may not be appealed against.

Following a final decision about a complaint (at Level 3 or after a Complaint Committee), the Complainant will be issued with a Completion of Procedures Letter to confirm that the University's internal procedures have been completed.

If you are dissatisfied with the final outcome you receive from the University, you can seek an external review of your case by submitting a claim to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#). Complaints to the OIA must be submitted within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter.

4.7. Monitoring

The Head of the Student Progress Service will make an annual report to the University Education Committee of all complaints investigated under this policy, including:

- The number of formal Level 2 complaints made, and whether they were upheld or rejected;
- The nature of the matters raised and any remedial action recommended and taken.