

Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure

Effective from 1 September 2023

This procedure is applicable to all students and should be read in conjunction with the Student Complaints and Resolution Policy. It sets out what current and former students can expect when they make a complaint about Newcastle University.

Please note that students will not be academically disadvantaged by submitting a complaint.

If you require any reasonable adjustments or support arrangements to be put in place for you while your complaint is being considered, please let us know via casework@ncl.ac.uk.

INTRODUCTION

Newcastle University has a [Student Charter – Rights and Responsibilities](#) that sets out the University's expectations for the academic and behavioural conduct of registered students. These values are essential to the proper functioning of an academic community.

The Complaints and Resolution Procedure is used to investigate all complaints made by a student about University facilities or the level of service or treatment they have experienced from a University employee, Academic Unit or Service.

This procedure is not used for:

- Academic misconduct (for example, cheating or plagiarism). Reports of academic misconduct are investigated under the [Procedure for Assessment Irregularities](#).
- Reports about the non-academic conduct of other Newcastle University students. Reports about other students are dealt with under the [Student Disciplinary Procedure](#).
- Academic Appeals. These complaints are considered through the [Academic Queries and Appeals Procedure](#).
- Accommodation Complaints. Complaints of this nature should be directed to either [Universities UK](#) (for private accommodation) or to the [University accommodation service](#) (for Newcastle University-owned accommodation).

SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

We understand that submitting a complaint can be a stressful experience. You may find it helpful to seek support and advice via the following services:

- [Student Health and Wellbeing Service](#)
- [Student Progress Service](#)
- [Student Advice Centre of the Students' Union](#)

If you are required to attend any meetings throughout this process, you may choose to be accompanied by a friend or supporter. Please see the [guidance on the role of a friend or supporter](#). We strongly encourage you to access this support.

STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

(See: [Fig.1](#): Quick Guide – How will my complaint be handled by the University?)

When you submit a concern or complaint to us, it will be considered under one of the following three levels:

- Level 1: Local Resolution
- Level 2: Formal Investigation
- Level 3: Case Review (Appeal) or Complaint Committee

To ensure that there is no conflict of interest, each of the three Levels of the procedure will be handled by a Complaint Officer who has had no prior involvement in your case.

If your complaint relates to a decision made by the University, the decision will stand until your complaint has been fully considered.

Level 1: Local Resolution

If you have a concern about University facilities, the level of service or treatment you have received from an Academic Unit or Service, or about the conduct of a University employee, you are encouraged to write to the relevant Head of School or Service within 3 months of the issue(s) arising.

The University will consider the issues you have raised and will write to you within 30 days of your concern(s) being raised, informing you of any decisions that have been made or actions taken, and the reasons for this.

Level 2: Formal Investigation

If the University's Level 1 response has not resolved your complaint, or if your complaint is so serious that you feel you cannot raise it directly with the relevant Academic Unit or Service, you can request a Level 2 Formal Investigation by emailing a completed [student complaints form](#) to casework@ncl.ac.uk. You should do this within 6 months of the matter arising (or within 3 months of your Level 1 response, where relevant).

Your complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 7 calendar days of receipt. If the Complaints and Resolution Procedure is not considered appropriate to examine the issues you raise, you will be directed to a more suitable procedure.

A Complaint Officer will be appointed to investigate your complaint and you may be invited to a meeting to clarify any issues raised.

The Complaint Officer will send your full complaint submission to relevant people within the Academic Unit or Service, requesting a response to the issues you have raised. They are normally given two weeks to respond and their response will be forwarded to you so that you can make any further comments you believe are relevant. You will normally be given two weeks to provide any additional comments.

The Complaint Officer will then consider all the information available about your complaint to decide on a suitable outcome and, where appropriate, recommend a resolution. The final decision will be communicated to you in writing, setting out the reasons for the outcome reached.

Level 2 complaints are usually determined within 60 days from the initial receipt of your complaint, although some circumstances may require a longer period of investigation and determination, for example if the issues you raise are particularly complex or if there is a large volume of evidence to review. We will contact you if a delay is expected.

Level 3: Case Review (Appeal)

If you are dissatisfied with the Complaint Officer's Level 2 outcome, you can appeal the decision by requesting a Level 3 Case Review. Your request should include one or more of the following grounds for appeal:

- Procedural irregularity: you think that something was not done correctly in the investigation of your complaint and that this may have affected the decision reached;
- New material evidence: new evidence is available, which was not reasonably available to you during the initial investigation of your complaint, and you believe that this may have an impact on the complaint outcome;
- Unreasonable decision: you consider that no reasonable person could have reached the same decision based on the available evidence.

If you would like to request a case review, you should submit your request in writing to the Academic Registrar (via casework@ncl.ac.uk) within 14 calendar days of the date of the Level 2 decision. The Academic Registrar will decide whether to undertake a review of your complaint case.

If the Academic Registrar considers that your review request is eligible, they will do one of the following:

- Offer you an alternative resolution, if appropriate ;
- Arrange for the complaint to be reconsidered under Level 2 by a different Complaint Officer who has no previous involvement in your case;
- Where the issues raised in your complaint are particularly serious, refer the issue to a Complaint Committee for consideration.

Level 3: Complaint Committee

Most complaints can be investigated and concluded based on written submissions alone. However, there are instances where the issues raised in a complaint are particularly complex or serious and warrant further consideration before an outcome can be reached.

In these circumstances, your complaint may be referred to the Academic Registrar to determine whether further consideration by a Level 3 Complaint Committee is appropriate. If your complaint is referred to a Complaint Committee, you will be informed in writing of this decision by the Complaint Officer.

A Chair for the Complaint Committee will be appointed by the Academic Registrar; the Chair is usually a Pro-Vice Chancellor with no previous involvement in the case. The Chair will appoint other suitably trained University employees or external advisor to form the committee, and the Committee may include a member of People Services, a Students' Union Sabbatical Officer, and any other senior University employees who have had no prior involvement in the investigation and are not members of your School or Academic Unit.

The Committee will investigate the complaint based on the information already submitted, although they may request additional information from you. You will have the opportunity to submit further evidence in support of your complaint prior to the Committee's consideration of the documentation.

If the Chair of the Committee feels it is necessary, they may convene a complaint hearing. If a hearing is convened, you will be invited to attend, along with any other parties or witnesses they believe would help them to determine the case. You will be provided with the date of the hearing, usually at least 10 working days in advance of the proposed date, and you will be sent a full set of case papers together with details of the process to be followed at the hearing at least 7 days in advance of the meeting.

After consideration of all the available evidence, the Complaint Committee will make a decision on the case. The Complaint Officer will notify you in writing of the decision, setting out the reasons and any recommended resolution.

Level 3 decisions, both by Complaint Committees and as a result of a Level 3 Case Review, are final. After you receive this final decision, you will be issued with a Completion of Procedures Letter to confirm to you that the University's internal procedures have been completed.

What if you are dissatisfied with the final outcome?

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. The University subscribes to this scheme. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome offered by the University, you can seek an external review by submitting a complaint once you have received your Completion of Procedures letter via the [OIA website](#).

Complaints to the OIA must be submitted within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.

Confidentiality (See [Student Complaints and Resolution Policy](#))

When you submit a complaint to the University, the person/service to which the complaint relates has the right to be made aware of the details of the complaint and provide a response to the issues you have raised. If your complaint includes any information that you are unhappy sharing with any specific person or service, please make sure that this is clearly indicated on your complaint form.

Do not include any sensitive or personal information within your complaint, unless it is relevant to the matters you are complaining about. If your complaint contains any personal information relating to a person other than yourself, it is your responsibility to make sure that you have their consent to disclose that information.

The University will not normally investigate complaints made anonymously. If there is a reason why you do not want to be identified through your complaint, please contact the Student Progress Service (via casework@ncl.ac.uk) for a discussion about whether your complaint can be investigated.

The Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure is an internal and confidential process. It is important that you - and any friend or supporter you choose to accompany you to meetings - should respect this confidentiality and treat all information as confidential.

Full complaint details will normally be shared with relevant University employees responsible for investigating and administering the complaint. Sometimes it is necessary to share details of the complaint investigation with other University employees so that appropriate processes can be followed and support can be offered to all affected parties. In these instances, case details will be limited and the information will be shared in confidence, in line with General Data Protection Regulations.

Fig. 1
Quick guide: how will my complaint be handled by the University?

