



**University of Brighton**

## **How Do I Complain? A Guide for Students**

### **What is a complaint?**

Whilst the University aims to provide the best possible educational experience for you, sometimes the service you have received may have been unsatisfactory and you wish to complain. This guide helps you through the process.

### **Where can I obtain a copy of the Student Complaints Resolution Procedure?**

<https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/reg/acs/docs/Student-Complaints-Resolution.pdf>

### **Where can I obtain advice and support?**

If you are considering making a complaint, the Students' Union can offer advice and guidance. Please contact them at [bsusupportservice@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:bsusupportservice@brighton.ac.uk) or telephone 01273 642876 for a confidential conversation about your options. This does not commit you to bringing a complaint unless you decide to go ahead and any conversation can remain confidential.

Advisers from the Students' Union can provide you with advice and support relevant to your individual circumstances, including helping you complete a Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form and accompanying you at meetings. You are encouraged to contact a Students' Union Adviser before submitting your complaint.

### **What can I complain about?**

- failure by the University to provide a satisfactory service
- the quality of facilities or learning resources
- misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the University
- concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching or administration including, where applicable, that provided by a partner college
- poor quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided directly by the University

- complaints involving other organisations or contractors providing a service on behalf of the University.

### **What can the procedure not be used for?**

It cannot be used as an attempt to challenge an academic decision or to complain about the behaviour of other students. Other procedures are available if you wish to complain about these matters.

### **What if I am unsure whether my issue(s) fall under the Student Complaints Procedure?**

You should contact an Adviser from the Students' Union who will be able to assist you, or the Appeals and Complaints Office.

### **What are the timescales for submitting a complaint?**

In order to ensure that your issue(s) are dealt with quickly the Student Complaints Procedure encourages you to bring your complaint informally to the attention of University staff as soon as possible.

If you have tried to address your complaint informally via the Stage 1 Early Resolution procedure and are dissatisfied with the response you can submit a Stage 2 Formal Complaint within 14 calendar days. This should be submitted on a Stage 2 Complaint Form directly to the Appeals and Complaints Office.

The Procedure is also available to former students of the University who submit a written complaint within 60 calendar days of the publication of their award or their withdrawal.

### **Can I make an anonymous complaint?**

The University does not accept anonymous complaints. In order to carry out a full investigation and respond to any issue(s) raised the University needs the name and contact details of any complainant. However, the University may need to take action that identifies a risk to the University community or the public.

### **What are the different stages for dealing with a complaint?**

The Student Complaints Procedure comprises:

- Stage 1 Early Resolution
- Stage 2 Formal Complaint
- Stage 3 Review.

### **Can a friend or family member complain on my behalf?**

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, it is not permissible to communicate with third parties regarding your complaint without your consent. You can nominate anyone to deal with your complaint, but you will need to confirm this when you submit the relevant form. Note that the first approach must be made by yourself.

### **Will my complaint remain confidential?**

Your complaint will be treated in confidence. With your agreement, a copy of a complaint will be circulated to the relevant individual(s) who may be the subject of the complaint. If you do not provide agreement to your complaint being disclosed, it may not be possible for the University to undertake an investigation or resolve your complaint.

### **Can I bring a companion to meetings?**

Where a meeting has been arranged with you to discuss your complaint you may bring a companion. A companion for the purpose of this process is a person who, at your request, may come with you and speak on your behalf. This person may be a representative from the Students' Union, a member of staff or another student. It would be appreciated if you could inform the meeting organiser if you intend to bring a friend.

### **What happens at Stage 1?**

Before making your complaint you should be clear what the problem is and the resolution you would like to see.

In the first instance, you should talk or write to the person directly concerned with your issue(s). For instance, if you have a complaint about a particular module, you should first bring it to the attention of your relevant lecturer. The Students' Union can offer advice about using the informal approach.

If during initial discussions you feel the informal route will not provide the appropriate resolution you may proceed to Stage 1 Early Resolution by contacting the School Complaints Officer (SCO).

The SCO will discuss the issue with you, clarify what it is you would like done to resolve your complaint and attempt to deal with it as swiftly as possible and within 14 calendar days, Occasionally this may require an element of investigation involving others.

If, during the investigation into your complaint, serious issues are raised and/or it is clear that the process cannot be completed within 14 calendar days you will be advised to submit a Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form to the Appeals and Complaints Office. Independent Advice and help is available from the Students Union.

## **What is a Stage 2 Formal Complaint?**

If you have raised a complaint under Stage 1 Early Resolution and remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you may wish to submit a formal complaint. Stage 2 Formal Complaints are normally only accepted on completion of a Stage 2 Student Complaint Form. The form is available on studentcentral or directly from the Appeals and Complaints Office.

## **How do I complete a Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form?**

Before submitting your Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form it is recommended that you seek advice from an Adviser in the Students' Union.

It is preferable that you type your Student Complaint Form.

It is very important that you complete all sections of the Form, as any omissions may incur a delay in processing your complaint.

Your explanations should be concise and as factual as possible. Any documentation in support of your complaint should be attached and recorded on your Form. Your evidence should be originals, wherever possible, but if photocopies are submitted, or you are submitting your Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form online you may be asked to provide sight of the original document(s) to verify authenticity.

You should keep a copy of your Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form and any supporting documentation you submit.

It is important to note that by signing the declaration on the Form, or by emailing it to the Appeals and Complaints Office, you are agreeing to the declaration.

## **What should I check before submitting a Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form?**

- You have obtained advice on how to make a complaint to the University from the Students' Union;
- You have read (and understood) the Student Complaints Procedure;
- You have clearly stated what would be a satisfactory outcome;
- You have completed all sections of the Form;
- You have identified whether you have any specific requirements relating to a disability or specific learning difficulty (should you wish to discuss any requirements please contact the Appeals and Complaints Office);
- You have provided all relevant documentary evidence to support your claim;
- You have taken a copy of your completed Form for your own records.

## **How do I submit my completed Student Complaint Form?**

Email:       Complaints@brighton.ac.uk

By hand or post:

Appeals and Complaints Office

Mithras House

University of Brighton

Lewes Road

Brighton BN2 4AT

## **When should I receive a response to my complaint?**

For a Stage 2 Formal Complaint you should receive a response acknowledging receipt very quickly. Normally you should receive a decision including any recommendations within 30 calendar days. If the process may be delayed you will be kept informed appropriately. ,

## **What happens at Stage 2 Formal Complaints process?**

Your complaint will be allocated for investigation by a University Complaints Officer (UCO). It is this Officer's responsibility to look into the issues raised in your complaint. This may involve meeting with you to clarify any issues identified. The UCO will write to you with a proposed resolution.

## **What happens at Stage 3 Review?**

If you still remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 Formal Complaint, you can submit a Stage 3 Review Form to the Appeals and Complaints Office. This is available online at studentcentral or from the Appeals and Complaints Office and should be submitted within 14 calendar days of the receipt of the outcome letter for the Stage 2 Formal Complaint.

It is only possible to request a Stage 3 Review by quoting one or more of three reasons:

i) proper procedures were not followed

ii) the outcome was unreasonable.

iii) new material evidence has come to light which you were unable for valid reason to provide earlier in the process.

If the Review Stage is upheld then you will be informed accordingly and the Complaint will be referred either to the original Complaints Officer or to one not involved in the previous investigation.

### **What can be the outcome of a complaint?**

Following an investigation into the matters identified in your complaint, it may be decided to:

- Uphold the complaint in full or part (and take any appropriate action);
- Dismiss the complaint in full or part if it is believed there is no case to answer;
- Dismiss the complaint as frivolous, vexatious or malicious.

### **How will I know when the process is complete?**

The University will provide you with a letter of completion confirming that the University's internal process is concluded. On receipt of this letter, if you still remain dissatisfied, you may apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) for reconsideration of your complaint under its rules.

### **What is the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)?**

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) operates an independent student complaints scheme. It will only consider cases that have completed the University's internal procedures. More information on its rules can be found at [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).