

## Student Complaints Procedure

**Responsibility of:** University Secretary

**Approval date:** September 2016

**Reviewed:** May 2018

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**Next Review Date:** May 2023

**Approved by:** Academic Board/Board of Governors

## **1 General Principles**

- 1.1 The University seeks to maintain high standards in its provision of courses, services and facilities to students. The University has established its student complaints procedures to deal with legitimate complaints from students in a fair, prompt and efficient manner.
- 1.2 Complaints will be addressed informally or formally through a three stage process. Stage I: Formal Resolution of Complaints by the School/College or Service Department; Stage II: Formal Resolution of Complaints by the UWL Complaints department; and Stage III: Complaint Review by the University Secretary or the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience).
- 1.3 All complaints will be dealt with without recrimination, and no student will be disadvantaged on account of raising a complaint. Students may complain individually or collectively, where appropriate. Complaints will be investigated objectively. However, anonymous complaints will not be accepted.
- 1.4 Students should normally make a complaint within the timeframe specified in each complaint stage. The University will only consider complaints outside the timeframe at its absolute discretion and where there is a valid reason for the delay.
- 1.5 All complaints will be dealt with constructively, and the student will be informed of the outcome. Where a complaint is upheld, the University will make an appropriate response including taking any necessary corrective action. Means of redress include an explanation of actions taken or planned and written or oral apologies. Where the complaint outcome includes an offer for the student, it should be accepted or declined within 15 working days from the date of the offer.
- 1.6 All complaints will be dealt with in confidence with the proviso that any person about whom a complaint is made shall be supplied with a copy of the complaint. A student may be asked to attend an interview with the member of staff investigating their complaint.
- 1.7 A record of complaints received from students and the means of resolution will be kept by the University Secretary and reported annually to the Academic Board as part of the University's monitoring and quality assurance processes. No information that will identify any individual will be available within the report.
- 1.8 A student may seek advice from the Students' Union when making a complaint and may be accompanied by another student or a representative, for example, an advisor of the Students' Union, in any meeting that takes place in connection with a complaint they have lodged. However, under no circumstances may the student be represented by an external organisation. Under no circumstances shall the costs be re-claimable save for expenses in exceptional cases.
- 1.9 For students under the age of 18 additional support may be provided.
- 1.10 Students bringing complaints in relation to the behaviour of staff may be supported by Student Services where appropriate in line with the Guidelines on Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour.
- 1.11 Where a complaint made by a student is believed to be frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice, the University reserves the right to take disciplinary

action against the student for breach of the Code of Conduct. This will be investigated as a potential breach of Section 3.2. of the Code:

Respect other members' basic rights to work and live in a safe, secure environment, free from anxiety, fear, intimidation and harassment.

- 1.12 The University reserves the right to withdraw the student's complaint if the complainant is not engaging with the complaint investigation process for more than 20 working when requested.
- 1.13 Advice on whether the complaints procedure applies and how it operates may be sought from the University Secretary or their nominee, or the Students' Union.
- 1.14 Where a complaint is upheld, the University will reimburse the student upon production of receipts for incidental expenses (e.g. travel and subsistence) that have been necessarily incurred by the student in the resolution of their complaint. If a complaint is not upheld the student will be informed of the reason(s) for that decision. The University may in its discretion reimburse the student upon production of receipts for incidental expenses necessarily incurred by the student in putting forward their complaint if satisfied that the complaint was made in good faith.

## **2 Scope of the Complaints Procedure**

- 2.1 This procedure is designed to deal with complaints arising from:
  - i) provision of academic services described in the University's publications including teaching, content of courses and support for learning
  - ii) incorrect or misleading information about services provided by the University
  - iii) provision of other University services described in literature published by the University
  - iv) inappropriate behaviour of members of staff
  - v) inappropriate behaviour of a student.
- 2.2 The student complaints procedure does not cover the following:
  - i) any matters relating to examination and assessment procedures or academic appeals. Information regarding the Appeals System is published in the Academic Regulations.
  - ii) disciplinary issues. Information regarding breaches of the Code of Conduct is published in the Student handbook.
  - iii) admissions procedures prior to enrolment as a student of the University. Information regarding complaints about the Admissions Process is published on the website  
**[www.uwl.ac.uk/admissionspolicy](http://www.uwl.ac.uk/admissionspolicy)**.
  - iv) complaints about the Students' Union. Information regarding complaints about the Students' Union is published on the Students' Union website  
**[www.uwlsu.com](http://www.uwlsu.com)**.
  - v) complaints about student accommodation that is not University owned and/or controlled. Information about how to make a complaint can be obtained from the Notting Hill Housing.

- 2.3 Where a student makes a complaint about the behaviour of another student or about unacceptable behaviour of University staff, the University Secretary shall consult as appropriate and determine the correct student or staff procedure or policy to be followed. Where appropriate the complaint will be referred under the staff or student disciplinary procedures. Such determination shall be final. Students should refer to the **Guidelines on Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour**.
- 2.4 This procedure applies to all students of the University of West London unless students are studying courses in other institutions, which are sub-contracted or validated by the University of West London. These students should use the procedures that are in place in that institution. Once the student has exhausted the procedures in place at their institution, they may request a review of the complaint by the University of West London (See Stage III below).

### **3 Informal resolution of complaints**

- 3.1 Most complaints will normally be resolved informally by an appropriate member of staff.
- 3.2 The informal complaint may be made orally or in writing, normally within 10 working days of the incident or action from which the complaint arises, or in any event as soon as possible.
- 3.3 The member of staff to whom the complaint is made will investigate or refer the complaint. A response will be made to the student via email, normally within 5 working days.
- 3.4 If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of this informal resolution of their complaint, then they should follow stage I, II and III procedures described in the formal complaints procedure below.
- 3.5 If a student requires advice or wishes to discuss the matter before making a formal complaint, they should consult their personal tutor, a student representative or an advisor of the Students' Union.

### **4 Stage I: Head of School/College or Service Department**

- 4.1 The Stage I complaint should be made in writing, preferably by completing an appropriate form, normally within 10 working days of the incident or action from which the complaint arises, or the outcome of the informal resolution.

The following details must be provided:

- a full statement of the complaint
- brief details of the steps already taken to resolve the complaint informally
- reasons for the student's dissatisfaction with the attempts to resolve the complaint informally
- what remedy the student is seeking
- a copy (not original documents) of any documentary evidence the student wishes to submit
- the student's name and the University student ID number
- full contact details for the student (including preferred method of contact, (e.g. email)
- whether the student has representation and if so whom

The complaint should be addressed to the University Secretary:

University Secretary,  
University of West London,  
St Mary's Road,  
London, W5 5RF

or [university.secretary@uwl.ac.uk](mailto:university.secretary@uwl.ac.uk)

- 4.2 The University Secretary's nominee will determine whether all the necessary information has been provided and may contact the student requesting additional details and evidence. In all cases, the receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days.
- 4.3 The University Secretary's nominee will forward the complaint to the Head of School/College or Service Department who will investigate the complaint using the information provided by the student in their written statement of the complaint. The School/College or Service Department will send a formal written response to the student, detailing the investigation, within 10 working days of the full complaint being received by the University. The response sent to the student must be copied to the University Secretary and all relevant parties (including the Students' Union where applicable).
- 4.4 In instances where it has not been possible to resolve the complaint within 10 working days for a legitimate reason, the relevant area investigating the complaint shall write to the student and inform them of:
- the name of the person investigating their complaint
  - the reason for the delay
  - the date by which the student will be notified of the outcome

The letter sent to the student must be copied to the University Secretary and all relevant parties (including the Students' Union where applicable).

## **5 Stage II: UWL Complaints department**

- 5.1 The Stage II formal complaint should be made in writing by completing an appropriate form, normally within 20 working days of the outcome of the Stage I resolution.

The following details must be provided:

- a full statement of the complaint
- a copy of Stage I formal complaint and a copy of the Stage I outcome letter.
- detailed reasons for the student's dissatisfaction with the Stage I outcome.
- what remedy the student is seeking
- a copy (not original documents) of any documentary evidence the student wishes to submit
- whether the student has representation and if so whom

The complaint should be addressed to the University Secretary:

University Secretary,  
University of West London,  
St Mary's Road,  
London, W5 5RF

or [university.secretary@uwl.ac.uk](mailto:university.secretary@uwl.ac.uk)

- 5.2 The Complaints and Compliance Officer will determine whether all the necessary information has been provided and may contact the student requesting additional details and evidence. In all cases, the Complaint department will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days.
- 5.3 The Complaints and Compliance officer will investigate the complaint using the information provided by the student with their complaint form. A formal response, detailing the investigation, will be sent to the student in writing within 25 working days of the full complaint being received by the University. The response sent to the student must be copied to all relevant parties (including the Students' Union where applicable).
- 5.4 In instances where it has not been possible to resolve the complaint within 25 working days for a legitimate reason, the Complaints department will write to the student and inform them of:
- the name of the person investigating their complaint
  - the reason for the delay
  - the date by which the student will be notified of the outcome

The letter sent to the student must be copied to the University Secretary and all relevant parties (including the Students' Union where applicable).

## **6 Stage III: Complaints Review**

- 6.1 If a student has reason to believe that their Stage II complaint has not been handled fairly, objectively or in accordance with the procedures described above, they should request a review of their complaint. A Stage III complaint constitutes a review and not a re-investigation of the complaint. The request for a review must state the grounds on which the review is sought and should be accompanied by appropriate documentary evidence.

Valid grounds for the review of the Stage II investigation outcome are as follows:

- there were procedural irregularities in the investigation of the complaint;
  - fresh evidence can be presented which could not reasonably have been made available with submission of the Stage II Form; or
  - the outcome of the investigation was not reasonable in all the circumstances, in which case the detailed reasons for the student's dissatisfaction with the Stage II investigation and the outcome should be provided.
- 6.2 The Stage III Review request should be made in writing by completing an appropriate form, normally within 15 working days of the outcome of the Stage II formal resolution.

The following details must be provided:

- a full statement of the complaint including the valid grounds for the review as detailed above.
- a copy of Stage II formal complaint and a copy of the Stage II outcome letter.
- what remedy the student is seeking.

- a copy (not original documents) of any new documentary evidence that was not available during Stage II complaint investigation
- whether the student has representation and if so whom.

The complaint should be addressed to the University Secretary:

University Secretary,  
University of West London,  
St Mary's Road,  
London, W5 5RF

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6.3 The University Secretary will review the handling of the complaint in the light of the student's written statement unless he/she was part of the original investigation. In this case, the complaint review will be referred to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience).

6.4 The University Secretary (or where appropriate the Pro Vice-Chancellor) may confirm or rescind an earlier decision in the light of this report. A written reply will be sent to the student within 20 working days of receiving the request for the review.

6.5 In instances where it has not been possible to review the complaint within 20 working days for a legitimate reason, the student will be informed of the reason for the delay and the date by which they will be notified of the outcome.

## 7 Referral to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (Completion of Procedures Letter)

7.1 The University of West London subscribes to the independent scheme for the review of student complaints. If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the review of their complaint, they may refer their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for external review.

7.2 Guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can be found on the OIA's website <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia.aspx>. The OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with through the University's internal procedures.

7.3 To make a complaint to the OIA, the student will require a Completion of Procedures letter.

Where the complaint has not been upheld, the University will issue a Completion of Procedures Letter automatically within 28 days from the Review outcome.

Where the complaint has been upheld and the University has offered some resolution to the student, the student may request a Completion of Procedures letter if they do not wish to accept the resolution offered.

The Completion of Procedures letter exhausts the University's internal procedures.

7.4 Students may also wish to seek advice from the Students' Union about taking their complaint to the OIA.