

Student Complaints Procedure

At the University we hope and expect that you will be satisfied with your experiences here as a student. We are always pleased to hear about particularly good aspects of your experiences, but we also recognise that there may be circumstances when you may not be satisfied. If you do have any issues or concerns about particular aspects of University life you are expected to raise them with an appropriate member of staff as soon as possible. Concerns about academic provision should be raised informally with your Personal Tutor or Adviser, course leader or Head of Department or School. Concerns about the provision of a facility or service should be raised informally with a member of the relevant team. If you are not sure about who to approach do speak to the Student Service Centre Desk or the Students' Union Advice and Support Centre staff. They are here to help you. If you remain unsatisfied or fail to resolve matters informally you may wish to submit a formal complaint.

Approved by:
Executive Board

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Introduction

1. The following procedures are intended to explain how you can submit a complaint about the University's provision of services or facilities, and how you can expect your complaint to be investigated. The purpose of these procedures is to facilitate fair consideration of your complaint, and it is hoped that in most cases complaints will be resolved satisfactorily. These procedures have been developed to ensure that complaints made, either individually or collectively, by students are treated seriously, investigated carefully and, if found to be justified, are acted upon.

What is a complaint?

2. A complaint can arise if one or more students have a specific concern about an action or lack of action by the University, the standard of a service provided by or on behalf of the University, or about matters that affect the quality of the learning opportunities. Examples may include:
 - (i) failure to meet obligations, including those outlined in handbooks
 - (ii) misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or other promotional material
 - (iii) concerns about the delivery of a programme (administration or teaching), including those delivered by a partner institution, placement providers or years in industry.
 - (iv) provision of poor quality facilities, learning resources or services including dissertation or thesis supervision.
3. The complaints process CANNOT be used to overturn an academic decision, for example, decisions about progression, marks, or termination of registration. There are other established systems or processes to help students appeal against these decisions which are summarised in Appendix 1. If you have any questions about the appropriate route for you please speak to the Student Service Centre Desk or the Students' Union Advice and Support Centre.

Who can make a complaint?

4. If you are enrolled on an academic programme delivered by the University you can submit a complaint, regardless of whether you are registered for the current academic year, subject to the below. Students who have recently left may also submit a complaint, subject to the time limits below.
5. **You are expected to make the complaint yourself within 3 months of the action or incident being complained about.** You may appoint a representative to communicate with us on your behalf, e.g. a friend or family member, but you must sign the form yourself, as we cannot accept a form signed by someone else on your behalf. You will need to ensure that your representative knows all about your complaint, is willing to represent you and can keep you fully informed as we will only correspond with your representative. We will not correspond with you as well. If you change your mind about being represented, or change your representative you will need to tell us in writing. Complaints made more than 3 months after the action or incident will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the Executive Director of Student Journey or their nominee. Exceptional circumstances may include evidence of a medical condition preventing the submission of the complaint, proportionate to the length of the delay.

6. **Where an action affects a group of students, you may wish to submit a group complaint.** In order to manage the complaint we will ask the group to nominate one student to act as group representative. All complainants should sign the complaint form at the point of submission, but we will only communicate with that representative, who is responsible for communicating with other group members.
7. In the event that we receive a number of similar or related complaints within a short period of time, we may decide to co-ordinate the investigation where cases overlap, but we will ensure that each student's circumstances are considered separately and will correspond with each student individually.
8. **Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated.** However, if there is a compelling case supported by evidence that warrants an investigation we may proceed, but you should be aware that raising concerns anonymously often impedes the investigation and the communication of the outcome.

The complaints process

9. There are 3 stages to the complaints process:
 - (i) **Early resolution (first stage complaint)** – In most cases you will be expected to attempt to resolve concerns locally in the first instance, for example at Department or School level or with the relevant department within the Professional Services. This might include face to face discussion or asking an appropriate member of staff to deal with the matter. If you remain unsatisfied and wish to proceed with a formal complaint we will require written evidence that you have attempted to resolve the matter informally.
 - (ii) **Formal (second stage complaint)** – If you are unable to reach a satisfactory conclusion at the early resolution stage, or if your complaint is not suitable for early resolution due to the complexity or nature of the concerns, you may escalate your complaint by submitting a formal complaint form. An investigation will be undertaken and you will be provided with a written outcome.
 - (iii) **Review** – If you are not satisfied with the conclusion of the formal investigation, you may request a review by the University Executive team. There are limited grounds on which you may request a review, the purpose of which is to ensure that appropriate procedures were followed and that the decision was reasonable. You will be provided with a written outcome.

Timescales

10. We aim to respond to all complaints as swiftly as possible and to complete a formal complaint and review within 90 calendar days after receipt, including the time required for students to submit material. There may occasionally be circumstances when, for good reason, we will need to extend the timeframe. Where this is the case we will notify you and keep you regularly informed of progress.
11. Where a complaint is identified as requiring swift action, for example, where there is a threat of serious harm, we will prioritise that complaint.

12. It is common for students to raise issues which contain matters that should be considered under another procedure, for example the Academic Appeals Procedure. Where this happens, we will tell you which specific issues will be considered under which specific procedure and will direct you to the alternative appropriate procedure. We may suspend the consideration of a complaint until a matter considered under another procedure has been investigated.

Support

13. We recognise that it is often not an easy decision to submit a complaint, and that you may have concerns about the impact on your relationship with our staff or on your academic studies. You can be confident that you will not be disadvantaged because you submitted a complaint. This includes handling your complaint with an appropriate level of confidentiality. Appendix 2 sets out the expectations of staff and students involved in complaints handling.
14. You are encouraged to use support services provided by the Students' Union Advice and Support Centre as the staff there can provide helpful independent advice and support to those who wish to submit a complaint.
15. If you have particular circumstances or individual needs, and with your agreement, we may adapt these procedures. Reasonable adjustments will be considered on a case by case basis and with the advice of Student Wellbeing.

Early resolution

16. There are systems in all departments and services to allow you to raise concerns or suggest improvements to our provision of services and support. All academic departments have Staff Student Committees, which are intended to provide a general means of communicating and resolving difficulties. Additionally, regular feedback surveys on teaching and administrative and other support services are undertaken. Many problems will be resolved by these mechanisms.
17. You are expected to raise any concerns about the provision with a member of staff familiar with the area of concern. Normally, it is appropriate to raise concerns about academic provision such as failure to meet obligations outlined in handbooks with your Personal Tutor or Personal Adviser, course leader or Head of Department or School Executive Dean. Concerns about the provision of a facility or service, e.g. security services or library facility should be raised with a staff member of the relevant team. If you are not sure about whom to approach speak to the Student Service Centre Desk or the Students' Union Advice and Support Centre staff.
18. If you remain unsatisfied or wish to pursue the concern further, your complaint form should include a written summary of attempts you have made to resolve your concerns, and any outcome provided by the Service/Department. We will contact the Service/Department to ensure that they have had the opportunity to consider and resolve your concerns before accepting your complaint for formal investigation.

Formal complaint

19. You should submit your complaint on the form accessible on the website. If you cannot access the form this way you should request one from the Student Services Centre. Completed complaint forms should be submitted electronically to complaints@rhul.ac.uk.
20. You should set out your concerns clearly and succinctly, providing evidence to support your concerns where possible. Evidence may include:
 - (i) Emails
 - (ii) Timelines of events, for example dates of meetings.
 - (iv) Independent medical evidence
 - (v) Reports by professionals
 - (vi) Financial information
 - (vii) Witness statements

Covert recordings of conversations or similar will not be accepted as evidence unless there are exceptional circumstances.

21. All complaints will be managed sensitively (see appendix 2), but you should be aware that staff involved in any action, service or facility referred to in your complaint may be asked to respond to your complaint statement and / or evidence. If you have provided any statements or evidence which you wish to remain confidential you should clearly indicate this on your form. The case officer will confirm what elements of your complaint can be kept confidential, and with your agreement, the investigation will proceed. Examples of circumstances which may require elements of a complaint to be kept confidential include complaints about a member of staff where a witness wishes their name to be removed from their statement when it is shown to that member of staff or personal medical reports.
22. On receipt of a formal complaint we will confirm receipt and briefly evaluate your submission to check that it is submitted under the right procedures, is within the 3 month deadline and provides sufficient evidence. If there are any queries we will contact you to ask and may require further information. Your complaint will then be allocated to a case officer.
23. The case officer may:
 - (i) Refer you to another procedure (which may require the suspension of the complaints procedure until the other procedure is completed).
 - (ii) Reject your complaint, for example, if it is outside the 3 month limit without a sufficient explanation. Your complaint will be closed and you will be provided with a Completion of Procedures letter.
 - (iii) Refer your complaint to an appropriate member of staff for early resolution, if there is no evidence that this has already been attempted.
 - (iv) Proceed to formal investigation.
24. After an initial review of the complaint, the case officer will ask parties involved to submit written statements and supporting evidence in response to your complaint statements. The case officer will collate any additional relevant information. This may include:

- (i) academic transcripts
 - (ii) relevant student handbooks, regulations and policies
 - (iii) notes and minutes of meetings
 - (iv) correspondence
25. The case officer will write a report summarising all the submissions and evidence and may make recommendations for the outcome of the complaint. Depending on the nature and complexity of the case, the case officer will refer this report along with your complaint submission and evidence to a decision-maker as follows:
- (i) Non-academic complaints will be referred either to the Executive Director of Student Journey or their nominee, or to a panel comprising a senior member of staff with a wide experience of University administration and a Student Union representative;
 - (ii) Academic complaints will be referred to a panel comprising a senior member of academic staff and a Student Union representative.
26. After considering the evidence and submissions, the decision-maker will decide whether your complaint should be upheld, not upheld, or partly upheld. In addition the decision-maker may:
- (i) make recommendations or
 - (ii) propose a remedy or remedies.

Where one or more of the remedies proposed in paragraph 26(ii) is financial compensation or a refund (for example of tuition fees or accommodation rent), the case officer will advise the decision-maker to ensure that the remedy is appropriate and consistent with previous decisions. The Executive Director of Student Journey, or nominee, may be asked to approve the financial remedy.

27. The University aims to provide an outcome in writing and the reasons for the decision within two months of receipt of the complaint. You will also be provided with a copy of any written statements, evidence and reports, and details of your right to take the complaint to the review stage. There may be occasions when this timescale cannot be met and if this is the case you will be advised of this and the reason(s) for the delay.
28. During the investigation the case officer will ensure you are kept informed about the progress of the investigation. If there are any delays you will be notified and provided with a revised timescale.

Complaints about members of staff

29. If, following the conclusion of the investigation, it is apparent that there is a case to answer with regards to the behaviour of the member of staff concerned, the panel will have the option to recommend that the matter is referred to Human Resources for further investigation.
30. You will not normally be informed of the outcome of the investigation by Human Resources, as this will be confidential to the member of staff, but you will receive an outcome letter in line with paragraph 26 and you will have the option to request a review of your case where you meet one or more of the criteria.

Review Stage

31. It is hoped that your complaint will be resolved following the investigation. However, if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint you can request a review by completing the relevant form and submitting it to compliance@royalholloway.ac.uk within 10 working days of the written outcome. A review will not normally consider your complaint afresh or involve a further investigation but will consider whether procedures were followed and that the decision was reasonable.
32. Your request for a review must be made on at least one of the following grounds:
- (i) fresh evidence can be presented which you could not with reasonable diligence have been submitted with the initial complaint and which might cause reasonable doubt as to the fairness of the decision in the outcome letter
 - (ii) there is evidence of a failure to follow the procedures which might cause reasonable doubt as to the fairness of the decision in the outcome letter
 - (iii) the decision maker at the formal stage reached an unreasonable decision, given the evidence available at the time.

Please note that further evidence will not normally be considered unless you can demonstrate why you could not have provided it at the formal consideration stage. If you are providing evidence from third parties, including witness statements or medical certificates, you must have requested them in good time before submitting your formal complaint.

33. If you do not request a review within 10 days of the date you were notified of the outcome, we will close your complaint file.

Review

34. On receipt of a request for a review we will confirm receipt and allocate your request to a case officer, who will communicate with you (or your representative) and will keep you informed of progress with your complaint.
35. The case officer will consider your request for a review to determine whether you have met the ground(s) for review. If the request does not fulfil the ground(s) selected, the case officer will consult with the Executive Director of Student Journey or their nominee and your request may be rejected.
36. If your request for a review is valid, your case will be presented to a named officer or their nominee who shall consider the details of the case and all relevant documentation provided during the investigation. They will review the case and may, if necessary, take further advice.
37. One or more of the following options are available when deciding upon the final outcome:
- (i) Amend the outcome of the formal stage;
 - (ii) Amend or apply any recommendations or remedy;
 - (iii) Refer the complaint, or an element of it, for further investigation;
 - (iv) Uphold the original outcome in full

38. Upon the conclusion of the review stage, whether the request for a review has been rejected or not, you will receive a Completion of Procedures letter confirming the University's final decision in the consideration of your complaint.

Adjudication of University Decisions

39. If you have exhausted these procedures but you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, you are entitled to ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) to conduct a review. The OIA is an independent review body, external to the University, and can look at issues such as whether we have followed our procedures, whether our procedures are reasonable, and whether our final decision was reasonable in all the circumstances. The OIA's Scheme Rules and guidelines are available on its website, www.oiahe.org.uk.
40. In order to apply to the OIA you will require a Completion of Procedures letter. If your complaint is rejected under paragraph 22(ii) of this procedure (for example because it is submitted outside the 3 month time- limit), or if, following a review in accordance with paragraphs 33-37 above, your complaint is not upheld, this letter will be issued automatically. In all other circumstances you will need to request a Completion of Procedures letter by writing to complaints@royalholloway.ac.uk within 1 month of completion of your case.

Monitoring and Records

41. The Council will receive regular reports (not less than one each academic year) concerning the operation of the complaints procedure. Such reports will not identify individuals or contain any confidential information relating to individual cases. Reports may also be provided to other committees and senior managers.
42. Records of formal complaints will be maintained by Student Administration, and will be kept securely. They will not form part of the official student record. It is expected that a copy of these records will be requested by and provided to the OIA during adjudication.
43. Where the OIA issues a final outcome following adjudication an anonymised version of the written outcome may be shared with the Students' Union Advice and Support Centre and other relevant departments. The purpose of this is to raise awareness of student concerns and to assist with the operation of these procedures.

Appendix 1: List of formal routes to solve problems

If you would like to:	
Appeal against a penalty you have received for an examination or assessment offence, including plagiarism.	You should refer to the Regulations on assessment offences for information about how to appeal.
Appeal against the decision of a Board of Examiners, for example, marks awarded for coursework, examinations or formal reviews, academic progression, degree classification or degree award, and termination of registration	<p>You may be able to appeal against the outcome of examinations or discontinuation of registration on academic grounds. See the Academic Appeals Procedure in the Academic Regulations</p> <p>If, however, the grounds of appeal are matters covered by this complaints procedure, the Investigating Officer of the appeal may at his/her discretion suspend the Appeals process whilst the complaint is investigated. The outcome of the complaint will inform the appeal decision. Decisions for both procedures, where appropriate, may be issued in the same outcome.</p>
Ask that your request for special assessment arrangements are reconsidered	You may be able to request a reconsideration of requests for special assessment arrangements. See the Regulations on special assessment arrangements
Appeal against a decision made by a Fitness to Practise Panel	You may be able to appeal against the discontinuation of registration on grounds of fitness to practice. See the Fitness to Practise Procedures
Appeal against a decision made by a Fitness to Study Panel	See the Support to Study Procedure
Appeal against a decision made by an authorised disciplinary officer or disciplinary panel	You should follow the relevant sections of the regulations, set out in the Student Handbook
Report personal harassment	You should refer to the Dignity and Respect Policy (Students).
Complain about the Students' Union	You should refer to the Students' Union complaints procedure
Complain about the health centre	You should use the Health Centre's complaints procedure. Complaint forms are available in the Health Centre Reception, the Student Services Office and the Students' Union
Complain about a decision made regarding your student fees.	<p>You should contact Student Services Centre</p> <p>If your registration has been discontinued for non-payment of fees, you may be able to appeal against the decision. See the Student Fee Regulations.</p>

Student complaints procedure

<p>Complain about learning opportunities delivered by the University's collaborative partners</p>	<p>You should use the partner's complaints procedure in the first instance. If your complaint is not resolved you may refer the complaint to the University for a review (section 30 onwards of these procedures). You will need to provide the University with a copy of the formal outcome from the partner's complaints procedure.</p>
<p>Complaint about a placement, year in industry, practice learning placement or similar University provision which has impacted on your learning experience.</p>	<p>You should contact the placement manager in the first instance, and follow any procedure set out in your department handbook.</p> <p>If your complaint is not resolved you may refer your complaint for a review by a named officer or their nominee using section 31 onwards of these procedures.</p>
<p>Complain about a decision made as part of the Admissions process, or the process itself.</p>	<p>The Admissions process has its own complaints procedure and you should refer to the Complaints section of the Admissions Policy.</p>

Appendix 2: Expectations of staff and students involved in complaints handling

We will:

1. Keep students informed throughout the process.
2. Deal with all complaints seriously and fairly and with an appropriate level of confidentiality, i.e. information will be released only to those who need it for the purposes of fairly investigating or responding to the complaint.
3. Judge all complaints on their individual merits and treat all complainants equally, and will ensure no student is disadvantaged or victimised for submitting a complaint.
4. Follow the principles of natural justice in a manner which is appropriate to the individual circumstances of the complaint. Case officers, panel members and members of the University's Executive team will not act in any matter in which they have a material interest, or an actual or potential conflict of interest.
5. Advise students to access support when submitting complaints, including advising students that they may be accompanied to meetings to discuss complaints.
6. Advise students if complaints about other students or members of staff have been upheld, but may not share specific details affecting individual students or staff members.

We expect you to:

1. Respond to requests for information from the case officer in a timely manner, and to keep them informed of any circumstances relevant to your complaint.
2. Provide appropriate evidence to support your complaint at the appropriate time.
3. Behave reasonably towards the case officer and others involved in considering your complaint. Frivolous or vexatious complaints may be closed, for example, where there is evidence of obsessive, repetitive or unreasonable pattern of behaviour, or abuse or harassment of staff.

Appendix 3: Glossary and terms

Case Officer	The member of staff who will co-ordinate the investigation and responsible for ensuring the outcome is communicated to the student in a timely manner. They will be assigned to the complaint and will be the point of contact for the student complaining and for any staff asked to provide a response or evidence.
Completion of procedures letter (often referred to as a COP)	A letter which confirms that the University procedures have been completed. It summarises the University decision and reasons for it, and advises the student that they may be able to apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for a review.
Decision-maker	The member(s) of staff or Panel who will decide whether a complaint is upheld or not
Named officer	An academic member of the University's Senior Leadership Team, approved annually by the Planning and Resources Committee or a Head of Professional Service.
Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)	An independent body established to review students complaints. Free to students, the OIA deals with individual complaints against Higher Education Institutions in England and Wales.
Remedy and recommendations	Where a complaint is partly or fully upheld the University will take some action for the benefit of the student which, wherever possible, will attempt to return the student to the position that they would have been in had the circumstances not occurred. A remedy may include an apology.
	Where a complaint has identified matters of concern, the University may recommend action to review or require improvements from a university service or department.