

Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure

Effective from 1 September 2026

Purpose

1. The Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure ('the Procedure') is applicable to all current and recent former students and sets out what they can expect when they make a complaint about Newcastle University. The word 'Student' is used throughout this Procedure to mean current students and recent former students.

Scope

2. This policy relates to student complaints regarding the facilities, level of service or treatment they have received from the University. This includes complaints about specific University employees, Academic Units, or service areas.
3. This procedure is not used for:
 - Academic misconduct (for example, cheating or plagiarism) - reports of academic misconduct are investigated under the [Student Academic Misconduct Procedure](#).
 - Student conduct - reports about the conduct of students are dealt with under the [Student Conduct Disciplinary Procedure](#).
 - Academic Appeals - these 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).
4. Students will not be academically disadvantaged by submitting a complaint.
5. The University protects and promotes freedom of speech and freedom of academic thought within the law. This Policy is not intended to investigate the expression of controversial, offensive or alternative views or beliefs unless such expression breaches the [University's Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech](#). Nothing in this policy should be read as undermining or conflicting with the free speech code of practice. In the case of any conflict, particular regard must be given to the Free Speech Code of Practice.

Support and guidance

6. We understand that submitting a complaint can be a stressful experience. Support

and advice can be obtained via the following services:

- [Student Health and Wellbeing Service](#)
 - [Registry and Education Services](#)
 - [Support & Advice Hub of the Students' Union](#)
7. If students are required to attend any meetings throughout this process, they 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 students to access this support.
 8. Where a student requires any specific adjustments or support arrangements to be put in place while their complaint is being considered, they should email casework@newcastle.ac.uk.

The complaints process

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

9. All submitted complaints will be considered under one of the following three levels:
 - Level 1: Local consideration
 - Level 2: Formal investigation
 - Level 3: Review atage OR Complaint Committee
10. The most appropriate Level for investigation of the complaint will be selected and does not necessarily need to commence at Level 1.
11. 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 the case.
12. If the complaint relates to a decision made by the University, the decision will stand until the complaint has been fully considered.

Level 1: Local consideration

13. If a student has a concern about University facilities, the level of service or treatment received from an Academic Unit or Service, or about the conduct of a University employee, they are encouraged to write to the relevant Head of School or Service within 3 months of the issue(s) arising.
14. The Head of School or Service will consider the issues raised and will normally respond normally within 30 calendar days of the concern(s) being raised by the student, informing them of any decisions that have been made or actions taken, and the reasons for this.

Level 2: Formal investigation

15. If the University's Level 1 response has not resolved the complaint, or if the student feels they cannot raise the complaint directly with the relevant Academic Unit or Service, they can request a Level 2 Formal investigation by emailing casework@ncl.ac.uk.
16. Formal complaints should be submitted within 4 months of the matter arising, or within 1 month of the Level 1 response, where relevant. Level 2 complaints are normally concluded within 60 calendar days from the date of the initial complaint submission, although some circumstances may require a longer period of investigation and determination, for example if the issues raised are particularly complex or if there is a large volume of evidence to review. Wherever possible, the student will be kept informed of any actual or anticipated delays in the investigation or conclusion of their complaint.
17. Complaints 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 raised, the student will be directed to a more suitable procedure.
18. A Complaint Officer will be appointed to investigate the complaint and will offer the student the opportunity to meet to clarify any points raised within their complaint. The Complaint Officer may also meet with School or Service colleagues who are the subject of the complaint.
19. The full complaint submission will be sent to relevant colleagues within the Academic Unit or Service, and a response to the issues raised will be requested within 14 calendar days.
20. The Unit/Service response will be forwarded to the student. The student will then be given 14 calendar days to provide any additional comments they believe are relevant.
21. Once they have received all submissions, the Complaint Officer will then consider all information available about the complaint to decide on a suitable outcome and, where appropriate, recommend a resolution. The final decision will be communicated in writing, setting out the reasons for the outcome reached.
22. Level 2 complaints are usually determined within 60 calendar days from the initial receipt of the complaint

Level 3: Review Stage

23. Where the student is dissatisfied with the Complaint Officer's Level 2 outcome, they can request a review of the decision through a Level 3 Case Review. The Level 3 request should be made under one or more of the following grounds for appeal:
 - Procedural irregularity: something was not done correctly in the investigation of the complaint and this may have affected the decision reached;

- New material evidence: new evidence is available, which was not reasonably available during the initial investigation of the complaint, and this may have an impact on the complaint outcome;
 - Unreasonable decision: no reasonable person could have reached the same decision based on the available evidence.
24. The student should clearly explain what information or evidence they believe supports their ground(s) of appeal in their request.
 25. Requests for Level 3 Case Reviews should be submitted in writing to the Academic Registrar (via casework@ncl.ac.uk) within 14 calendar days of the date of the Level 2 decision and the Academic Registrar will decide whether to admit the request for review based on whether there are potential grounds for the decision to be revisited. Where there are no grounds presented or clear concerns raised warranting a review of the Level 2 decision, the Academic Registrar may decline to admit the request.
 26. Consideration of admitted Level 3 requests for review are normally concluded within 30 calendar days of the request date.
 27. If the Academic Registrar considers that the review demonstrates that one or more grounds have been met, they will do one of the following:
 - Offer an alternative resolution, if appropriate and available;
 - Arrange for the complaint to be reconsidered under Level 2 by a different Complaint Officer who has no previous involvement in the case;
 - Where the issues raised are particularly serious, refer the issue to a Complaint Committee for consideration.

Level 3: Complaint Committee

28. 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, a complaint may be referred to the Academic Registrar to determine whether further consideration by a Level 3 Complaint Committee is appropriate.
29. If a complaint is referred to a Complaint Committee, the student will be informed in writing of this decision by the Complaint Officer.
30. 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 appropriate and experienced University employees or external advisors 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 with no prior involvement in the investigation or the student's education.

31. The Committee will investigate the complaint based on the information already submitted, although they may request additional information. The student will have the opportunity to submit further evidence in support of the complaint prior to the Committee's consideration of the documentation.
32. If the Chair of the Committee feels it is necessary, they may convene a complaint hearing. If a hearing is convened, the student will be invited to attend, along with any other parties or witnesses they believe would help them to determine the case.
33. The student will be provided with the date of the hearing, usually at least 10 calendar days in advance of the proposed date, and will be sent a full set of case papers together with details of the process to be followed at the hearing at least 7 calendar days in advance of the meeting.
34. After consideration of all the available evidence, the Complaint Committee will make a decision on the case. The Complaint Officer will notify the student in writing of the decision, setting out the reasons and any recommended resolution.
35. Level 3 decisions, including the decision of the Academic Registrar not to admit a review request, by Complaint Committees or as a result of an admitted Level 3 Case Review, are final. After communication of the final decision, the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures Letter to confirm that the University's internal procedures have been exhausted.

External review

36. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. The University subscribes to this scheme.
37. If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome offered by the University, they can seek an external review by submitting a complaint via the [OIA website](#) once they have received a Completion of Procedures letter.
38. Complaints to the OIA must be submitted within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.

Key principles for operating this procedure

Openness and honesty

39. Any student or University employee asked to give a statement or evidence to inform an investigation should ensure that they do so promptly, honestly and objectively.

Confidentiality

40. The Procedure is an internal and confidential process. Students, and anyone accompanying them, must treat all information related to the complaint as confidential.

All University employees and students involved in an investigation share a duty of confidentiality and should only discuss the case with those who have a legitimate need to know.

41. Investigations follow the principles of natural justice. This means that individuals or services named in a complaint will be informed of the details and given the opportunity to respond.
42. Full complaint details will normally be shared with relevant University staff responsible for managing and investigating the complaint. Where necessary, limited details may be shared with other staff to support the investigation process or provide appropriate support. All information sharing will be conducted confidentially and in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
43. By submitting a complaint, students consent to relevant staff accessing and processing their data for investigation purposes. If consent is not given, the University will be unable to proceed with the complaint.
44. Students should only include personal or sensitive information where it is directly relevant to the complaint. If including information about other individuals, students must ensure they have obtained their consent. The University may process and share personal data for legitimate purposes related to investigating the complaint, in compliance with GDPR.

Anonymous complaints

45. 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 Student is known to the University but not disclosed to any responding parties).

Complaints about University employee conduct

46. Where a complaint is raised about any named University employee, a case conference will normally take place between the Registry and Education Services and the named University employee's Line Manager or Head of School/Service to determine at which level the complaint will be initially considered.
47. Complaints relating to the academic provision of a programme of study or the feedback received from University employees on academic work will normally be investigated at Level 1 of the Procedure in the first instance.
48. Complaints raised about the personal conduct of University employees will normally be investigated at Level 2 of the Procedure, in collaboration with People Services. Any evidence or outcome resulting from the investigation may be considered separately by People Services.

Unacceptable behaviour

49. The University reserves the right to terminate a complaint investigation where a student's behaviour or language in relation to the complaint is considered to be disrespectful, offensive or disruptive. Examples of such behaviours include (but are not limited to):
- Threatening, intimidating or abusive behaviour or language towards any University employee associated with the complaint investigation;
 - Providing dishonest information or falsified evidence as part of the complaint investigation;
 - Submitting complaints which may be deemed malicious or vexatious.
 - Repeated and excessive communication relating to a complaint.
50. Where a student engages in any disruptive or offensive behaviours during the course of the complaint investigation, the University may consider these in line with the [Student Disciplinary Procedure](#).

Complaints out of time

51. Concerns, complaints or requests for review submitted after the time limits set out above will only be admitted where there is a credible and compelling reason to admit them out of time. Appeals will not be admitted out of time where the length of delay makes it reasonable for the University to decline to consider the matter, regardless of reason for delay.
52. The Academic Registrar, or their nominee, is responsible for deciding whether a complaint or review request submitted out of time will be admitted. The Student will be informed whether or not a complaint submitted out of time is admitted. If not admitted, a Completion of Procedures Letter (CPL) will be issued, which confirms that the University's internal procedures have been completed.

Group complaints

53. Where the issues raised in the complaint affect more than one student, a group complaint can be submitted.
54. One student must be nominated as the group representative and will be responsible for liaising with the other members of the group. The University will normally only communicate directly with the nominated student, although the outcome can be sent directly to each member of the group particularly where a settlement offer is being made.
55. Where students have personal circumstances which require specific consideration, they should submit a separate complaint, which will be considered on an individual basis.

Related investigations

56. Parallel investigations about the same substantive matter will only be considered in

exceptional circumstances, as determined by the Academic Registrar.

57. Where the Student is involved in another ongoing formal University investigation (for example: Academic Misconduct, Student Disciplinary, Academic Appeals), the Academic Registrar, or nominee, will determine whether the complaint may proceed simultaneously.
58. To ensure that reports are investigated fairly and in a way that protects the impartiality of the process, complaints made about the handling of a University investigation will be placed on hold until the conclusion of the original investigation. This is without prejudice to the outcome of any investigation and should not preclude any interim precautionary action to be taken, as deemed necessary under the [Student Conduct Risk Management Procedure](#).

Document control	
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Fig 1. How will my complaint be handled by the University?

