

RECEIVED A COMPLAINT? - KNOW WHAT TO DO!

A QUICK GUIDE FOR ALL STAFF

The University has a Student Complaint Procedure (SCP) for complaints from students.

The SCP has three stages. Stage 1 is called 'local resolution'. Any member of staff receiving a complaint at 'frontline' is expected to try to resolve the issue quickly and effectively. Where necessary, a Responsible Officer or staff member within the Department/Faculty/Service should be providing a formal response within 21 calendar days. Complaints are often an opportunity to improve our processes, and handling them well is important. If you receive a complaint, you need to know what to do.

1 Recognising a complaint (see over for more details)

Someone may say they wish to complain, or they may just express to you a general dissatisfaction with an issue. A complaint can be made in person, over the phone, by letter or email, or by voicemail. If in doubt, assume this is a complaint.

2 Is the issue one you can deal with?

Can you resolve the matter quickly – perhaps by giving an apology or by putting things right? If so, do so. If you can't, but know who can help, tell the complainant who you are passing the issue on to, and tell the recipient that you are passing this complaint on to them to deal with. If you don't know who might be able to help with the issue – perhaps because it is not relevant to your area – seek advice from your manager or speak to your area contact.

3 Once you have resolved the issue...

All complaints, however minor, require to be logged. Make sure you keep a record of the complaint, with details of who it was from, what the issue was, and how you resolved it.

4 Don't...! (Some things are guaranteed to make matters worse!)

DON'T tell the complainant to go elsewhere, without first checking that you are sending them to the right place, and that someone there is expecting contact from them.

DON'T undertake to get back to someone and then fail to do so – even if it is just to say that matters will take a little longer than you anticipated.

DON'T tell someone to put things in writing. If they are trying to resolve things at frontline, the complaint doesn't need to be in writing.

5 Moving things on

Stage 2 of the SCP is the 'formal stage'. For issues which can't be resolved at frontline, or where the complainant is unhappy with the local resolution, refer the complainant to raise a formal complaint within 28 days, further information and the formal complaint form is available at: <https://www.studentcomplaints.admin.cam.ac.uk/student-complaints>. Stage 3 allows students to review a stage 2 decision.

6 More information?

Contact the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA) at studentcomplaints@admin.cam.ac.uk.

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT? - See the SCP for definitions:

For the purpose of this procedure, a complaint may be defined as:

'An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more individuals about the standard of service, action or lack of action by or on behalf of the Institution.'

A complaint may relate to:

- the quality and standard of service
- failure to provide a service
- the quality of facilities or learning resources
- treatment by or attitude of a staff member or contractor
- inappropriate behaviour by a staff member or contractor
- the failure of the University to follow an appropriate administrative process
- dissatisfaction with the University's policies.

The definition of a complaint is very broad and the list above is not exhaustive. However, not every concern raised with the University is a complaint. For example, the following **are not complaints to be considered by the Student Complaint Procedure:**

- a routine, first-time request for a service
- a Freedom of Information request or Subject Access Request
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- a response to an invitation to provide feedback through a formal mechanism such as a questionnaire or committee membership will generally not be treated as a complaint
- an insurance claim
- an issue which is being, or has been, considered by a court or tribunal
- a request for compensation only
- an attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where the University's procedure has been completed and a final decision has been issued
- a grievance by a member of staff which is eligible for handling through staff procedures
- a complaint about examination results, or in response to a University decision (these will have alternative review routes)
- a complaint about a College matter

These issues will be dealt with under the alternative appropriate processes rather than under the SCP. It should be noted, however, that some situations can involve a combination of issues, some are complaints and others are not, and each case should be assessed on a case by case basis. If you are unsure, contact OSCCA for further information at studentcomplaints@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Note that complaints can come from current or recent students.