

Quality Handbook

Student Complaints Procedure

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This procedure has been revised in consultation with the Students' Union and has been approved by the University's Board of Governors on 6th July 2017 for operation with regard to student complaints made in the 2017/18 academic year onwards. This version supersedes any previous versions. The Procedure is written and maintained by Academic Registry.

A. PRINCIPLES

The University is committed to providing high quality services. It welcomes the opportunity to correct mistakes and clarify misunderstandings and to respond positively and constructively on any occasion when you feel the need to express dissatisfaction with a particular service or other aspect of University provision. You will always receive a response to your complaint and, if your complaint is upheld, the University will, wherever possible, put things right. If a complaint is not upheld, you will be given reasons for the decision. This procedure enables you to know clearly how, where and to whom complaints should be made and from whom you can get help and advice if you need it.

The University believes that, usually, a complaint can and should be addressed quickly. To enable this to happen you are expected to take the matter directly to the member of staff best able to deal with it as soon as possible. You can find more guidance on informal resolution of your complaint via mediation in appendix one. If informal resolution of the matter is not possible you may enter the formal procedure set out in Section K at Stage One, where a complaint needs to be submitted in writing. Should your complaint not be resolved at this stage there is a further stage (Stage Two) which provides for an independent review of the outcome of the consideration of the complaint at Stage One. This concludes the University's Complaints Procedure, subject to any considerations of material procedural irregularity as referred to in Section M. Once the University's procedures have been exhausted you have the right, if you remain dissatisfied, to take your complaint to independent external review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education as outlined in Section N.

If a complaint and academic appeal are submitted at the same time and relate fundamentally to the same issue the academic appeal process will be paused until the complaints procedure has been concluded. Once the outcome to the complaint is known this will be used to inform the appeals process.

An appropriate way of framing your complaint is to be very clear about what it is that you are complaining about, why you are not happy with it, and what it is that you would like to see done to resolve this issue for you. If your complaint covers several different issues, please be sure to separate them out, and address the points above for each of them. This helps us to respond properly to your complaint. Please refer to the guidance notes on framing your complaint.

B. SCOPE

This procedure, which can be used for both individual and collective complaints, is designed for complaints from students (including students on leave of absence or on placement) about all aspects of the University's provision, other than those specified below, and enables you to raise matters of proper concern.

This procedure is not to be used for any of the following matters, for which separate policies and procedures exist. Please refer to "A Guide to Student Procedures" (Appendix four) for details of the procedures dealing with these issues:

- a) complaints about the Students' Union;
- b) complaints about other students;
- c) safeguarding issues which relate to children and vulnerable adults;

- d) matters relating to assessment performance and issues of academic judgement, except where there is a complaint about service provided which needs to be resolved before an academic appeal decision can be made. The University reserves the right to reclassify a complaint as an academic appeal or vice versa, if the submission has been made to the incorrect procedure, or the submission falls properly within the remit of one procedure rather than the other;
- e) matters relating to fitness to practice where there is an existing relevant fitness to practice procedure;
- f) complaints that must be dealt with by third parties, for example a partner college, school or commercial or government organisation such as the Home Office or Student Finance England; these organisations have their own complaints procedures and it is their organisational procedure which you must follow as the University has no part or influence in their decision making process.
- g) complaints from third parties – people who are not registered students of the University;
- h) where your complaint relates to harassment, then it will be dealt with under this procedure, but different timescales will apply. Please refer to appendix three for the timescales and definitions of harassment.

The University will not address anonymous complaints via this procedure. Please refer to the University's Public Interest Disclosure policy (whistleblowing) for information on how to address matters in this way.

C. TIME LIMITS

Ideally you should make your complaint as soon as possible, to enable the University to investigate and respond to your complaint in a timely manner, and you must make your complaint within three months of the matter that prompted your complaint.

The University is committed to dealing with all complaints as quickly as possible and will follow the time limits set out in this Procedure. However, from time to time there may be valid reason for a delay (e.g. a member of staff who is key to your complaint is on leave or ill). If these circumstances arise you will be informed of any delay and the reason for it.

Where a complaint alleges harassment by staff, the investigation and the response to you will take place within a shorter timescale. See appendix three for details.

D. ADVICE

You can receive advice as to the operation of the procedure from the Student Casework Manager, in Academic Registry. Telephone 01915152941 or email studentcasework@sunderland.ac.uk.

You can seek advice, advocacy and representation from the Students' Union who can be contacted on 0191 515 3030 or email su.studentadvice@sunderland.ac.uk

E. CONFIDENTIALITY

The University will deal with complaints discreetly and sensitively and you will be treated without discrimination or disadvantage. Any complaint will be dealt with in as confidential a manner as is practical; however any evidence submitted as part of the complaint will be made available to both the complainant and those members of staff who need to see it in order for the complaint to be considered. In some cases a duty to breach confidentiality may exist, typically where necessary to do so for the safety of you or of other people.

If there is any aspect of your complaint or evidence which you feel must remain confidential you must discuss this with the Investigating Officer at interview. The University cannot guarantee that this will be possible and highlights that in cases where some information is restricted, due to a request for confidentiality, the University may not be able to ensure that full consideration is given to each case. The Investigating Officer will be able to advise you of the position in relation to your request.

Please be aware that we *may* not be able to disclose outcomes about actions taken in respect of staff due to our obligations in respect of confidentiality in employment matters.

F. ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

At any stage, you may also request mediation to help resolve your complaint - see appendix one. Mediation is a method of conflict resolution that brings the parties together with a trained mediator in order to find a solution, and we encourage complainants to consider this. This can be done by contacting the Student Casework Manager, in Academic Registry (studentcasework@sunderland.ac.uk, 0191 515 2941).

G. SUPPORT AND REPRESENTATION: COMPLAINANTS AND THOSE WHO ARE THE SUBJECT OF COMPLAINT

You have the right to be accompanied to a meeting or represented at that meeting by an elected officer or member of staff of the University of Sunderland Students' Union, or by a fellow enrolled student, other than where an alternative arrangement would be a reasonable adjustment agreed by the University in response to a diagnosed disability.

Students accessing this procedure are adults, and the University's contract is with the student. In the light of this, the University expects that students would deal with their own case, unless for good reason they are unable to do so. The Students' Union may act on a student's behalf.

In an exceptional case where a third party does represent a student, full written consent is required from the student for this to take place (unless the student is incapacitated and unable to give consent), and to allow the University to disclose any information necessary to deal with the case. Consent from the University may be withdrawn at any time if the third party's behaviour is not appropriate, and the University will only communicate to one party at a time.

The University will not accept complaints made on behalf of students, by University staff or staff at Partner Colleges.

If a complaint is made against an individual, that individual will also have the right to be accompanied and/or assisted by another member of the University community in any related investigation.

When a complaint is made against an individual, even at informal stage, that individual should be notified of the complaint. Such notification must be given before any further action takes place in relation to the complaint unless to do so would prejudice any other formal University process or external criminal investigation and in which case notification must then be given as soon as is reasonably practicable having taken into consideration the particular circumstances of the matter. At the informal stage any decision to delay notification to the individual can only be made by the relevant Dean of Faculty or Director of Service who must record the reasons for the delay. Where a complaint has moved straight to (or progressed to) the formal stage, a decision to delay notification can only be taken by the Academic Registrar.

The outcome of the investigation will be communicated directly to any individual who is the subject of the complaint by the Investigating Officer following the issue of the decision to the student.

H. GROUP COMPLAINTS

If more than one person wishes to submit a complaint about the same issue they must:

- a) nominate one or two people who are submitting the complaint to whom the University should respond and who will inform the rest of the group as to the progress and outcome of the complaint;
- b) enclose a list of the names, student registration numbers and signatures of all students who are party to the submission of the complaint.

I. STUDENTS STUDYING AT PARTNERS OR ON PLACEMENT

If you are a student studying on a University of Sunderland course at a college or study centre, or a University of Sunderland student on a work or teaching placement, to whom you complain depends upon who provides the service that you are complaining about.

- a) Services provided by a partner college, study centre or placement provider:

You must first exhaust the internal complaints procedure of that institution, school or company. If you have done that but the issue has still not been resolved to your satisfaction, and if studying as a partner the complaint is a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of a student's learning opportunities you may access this procedure at Stage 2. To do this, you should submit your complaint to the Student Casework Manager, as specified in section K of these procedures. You must enclose a copy of your original complaint to your college or study centre, and the response from them which will demonstrate that you have exhausted their internal procedures.

b) Services provided by the University: you should use this procedure.

J. THE PROCEDURE – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

The best way to deal with most complaints is for the student to raise the issue promptly with the relevant staff locally in the area where the issue arose, and the University expects that you will do this before making a formal complaint. Guidance on approaches to informal resolution for both students and staff can be found in appendix one.

K. THE PROCEDURE – STAGE ONE: INITIAL FORMAL COMPLAINT

If you are dissatisfied with the response to your attempt to resolve the matter directly with the member of staff concerned, you should contact the Student Casework Manager in Academic Registry (telephone 0191 515 2941, email to studentcasework@sunderland.ac.uk).

If you wish to pursue a formal complaint then you must complete an official Complaint Form and submit it within five working days of receipt of the said response. You can obtain a Complaint Form from Academic Registry, the Students' Union, the Student Gateways and from the University website. Advice on how to complete the Form can be obtained from Academic Registry or the Students' Union.

You must sign and date the Complaint Form and ensure that it:

- a) outlines the complaint;
- b) describes what you have done already to resolve your complaint and gives details of the response you have received (you should include a copy if in writing);
- c) explains why you remain dissatisfied, and;
- d) explains the outcome you want.

If your form does not contain all of the required information it will be returned to you and you will be asked to provide the correct information. Once this has been received the timescales outlined in Section K will begin.

You must send or deliver the Complaint Form to the Student Casework Manager who will acknowledge receipt and forward the form to the relevant Dean or Director. At this point the Dean or Director will determine if an early resolution is possible and contact you, in writing within five working days to tell you how they will resolve your complaint.

If early resolution is not possible, an Investigating Officer will be appointed to consider your complaint and will acknowledge its receipt within five working days. They will then undertake an investigation into the complaint. You and any person against whom you have made a complaint will be interviewed as part of this investigation.

Once the investigation has concluded the relevant Dean or Director will provide you with a written response as soon as possible but not later than 30 working days after receipt of the Complaint Form (see also Section C, Time Limits). If the complaint is upheld or partially upheld, you will be informed

what action is to be taken. If the complaint is not upheld you will be given reasons for the decision.

L. THE PROCEDURE – STAGE TWO: COMPLAINT REVIEW

If you remain dissatisfied with the response and wish to take the matter further, you must complete a Complaint Review Form and submit it to the Student Casework Manager within ten working days of the receipt of the response.

You must sign and date a Complaint Review Form, which includes a statement explaining why you remain dissatisfied, and to which you must also attach:

- a) a copy of the your original Complaint Form;
- b) a copy of the response made by the Dean/Director;
- c) what the desired outcome to your complaint is.

The Student Casework Manager, who acts as Officer to the Complaints Review Panel, will:

- a) acknowledge receipt within five working days;
- b) send a copy to the relevant Faculty or Service within five working days, which must send a copy of their investigation file to the Student Casework Manager within five working days;
- c) convene a Panel and send all documentation to Panel members and the complainant seven working days after receipt of the file. The complainant should then request any additional information from the Student Casework Manager within a further five working days;
- d) convene a meeting of the Panel no later than forty working days of the submission of the request for review.

It should be noted, however, that the Complaints Review Panel at Stage Two will only be convened in circumstances where Stage One has been completed. The purpose of the review is not to reinvestigate a complaint but to ensure that procedures have been followed at the initial investigation stage.

The constitution of the Panel will be as follows:-

- a) a Deputy Vice Chancellor or Pro Vice Chancellor (Chair);
- b) the President of the Students Union, or in his / her absence a Vice-President;
- c) a Dean/Director of a Faculty /Service, or a senior member of staff designated by a Dean or Director.

Those appointed to the Panel will not have had any prior involvement in the case. The Panel will call such members of the University community as may be appropriate to assist the progress of the review.

You will have the right to a personal hearing in the course of the review, as will any individual against whom a complaint is made. You may be accompanied, or represented, by a member of the University community as defined in Section G, and if you are under the age of eighteen you must be accompanied by a parent, guardian or other responsible adult. If you are unable to attend you may nominate a representative to attend on your behalf, provided that the representative is also a

member of the University community. Both the student requesting review and those responding to the complaint will be present at the Hearing at the same time, and both parties will hear all of the evidence presented to the Committee and have the opportunity to comment on it. Where agreed, a student's presence at a Panel may be through virtual means such as video or telephone conferencing.

The Panel will review the complaint and make a determination which will be communicated to you and all other relevant parties, normally within seven working days. If this timescale is to be extended for any reason, you will be advised of this in writing

The University will consider requests that a contribution towards reasonable and proportionate incidental expenses necessarily incurred by successful complainants be made. Such contribution would be approved on the recommendation of the Student Casework Manager in consultation with the Chair of the Review Panel, provided that complainants submit requests in writing in advance of the Review Panel hearing.

M. MATERIAL PROCEDURAL IRREGULARITY

In this context '**material procedural irregularity**' means that the University has not complied with its own procedures in the handling of your complaint, and that the irregularity was such that it could have made a significant difference to the outcome of the University's consideration of your complaint.

When the outcome of the Stage Two review is communicated to you, you have ten working days to submit in writing to the Head of Legal and Governance any challenge to the decision on grounds of material procedural irregularity in the handling of your complaint. If you do this the University will defer the issue of the Completion of Procedures letter until this has been considered.

Your right to challenge on grounds of material procedural irregularity is conditional upon the receipt by the Head of Legal and Governance of clear evidence of material procedural irregularity in the prior consideration of your complaint. This must be received by the Head of Legal and Governance within 10 working days of the date of the outcome of the Stage Two Review. Subject to the Head of Legal and Governance being satisfied as to the existence of evidence of material procedural irregularity as defined above, the irregularity will be reported to the Vice Chancellor & Chief Executive with advice in relation to appropriate further action. The Vice Chancellor's decision in relation to further action will be confirmed to you in writing within 20 working days of your full submission to the Head of Legal and Governance.

N. EXTERNAL REVIEW

Subject to any request for review on grounds of material procedural irregularity under the terms of Section M the outcome of Complaint Review will conclude the University's consideration of the complaint. The University will issue an official Completion of Procedures letter as confirmation.

When you have received an official Completion of Procedures letter confirming that the internal procedures of the University have been concluded, you have the right to submit your complaint for review to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for

Higher Education (OIA) if you remain dissatisfied. If you choose to do this, you should do so as soon as possible and must do so no later than twelve months of the issue of your Completion of Procedures letter, using the Scheme Application form. The procedures and the form will be available to you from Academic Registry or from the University of Sunderland Students' Union (who will also be able to provide you with advice and assistance), or from the website of the OIA:

<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/index.asp>

O. REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

The University will make reasonable adjustments at any stage of the proceedings to accommodate the needs of students with protected characteristics.

P. INAPPROPRIATE COMPLAINTS AND COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

The University is committed to considering matters of proper concern raised by students. However, you should not make a complaint if you do not have evidence to support your complaint, or if the complaint is malicious, vexatious or frivolous (see Appendix Two for definitions of these terms). In exceptional circumstances, if a complaint is felt to be unacceptable on one of these grounds, then it will be referred to the University's Legal Services where a decision will be made on whether the complaint may proceed. If the University judges that your complaint should not proceed, you will be notified of this in writing, together with the reasons why. You should also note the section in Appendix Two which sets out the University's approach when dealing with unacceptable behaviour on the part of a complainant.

Q. LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

If you start legal proceedings against the University, any complaint will be paused until those proceedings are complete. The University may use failure to allow its internal procedures time to complete, as part of its defence in any legal proceedings.

R. MONITORING AND REPORTING

The University will monitor the operation of the Student Complaints Procedure in such a way as to assist in the maintenance and continuous improvement of service standards. The University will publish an annual report of complaints received and how they were resolved and this can be found in Section F of the Academic Quality Handbook.

APPENDIX 1 INFORMAL RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS

Informal Resolution: A Guide for Students and Staff

The best way to deal with most complaints is for the student to raise the issue promptly with the relevant staff locally in the area where the issue arose. It is important that students with an issue of informal complaint are able to air their concerns and to feel that they have been listened to.

Staff might take a number of approaches to responding to issues raised, for example:

- by face to face discussion with the student
- by providing more information and/or an explanation to the student
- by investigation and providing a response
- by finding or suggesting solutions
- by being empathetic and understanding when there is no apparent solution
- by giving an apology on behalf of the University where it is appropriate to do so
- by asking an appropriate member of staff to deal with the matter
- By suggesting mediation.

Questions for staff to consider might include:

- Do I understand the outcome that the student wishes to achieve?
- Can this outcome be achieved? If delivering it is outside my authority, who would be the appropriate person to refer this to?
- Is this a straightforward case, or do I need to take advice?
- Can this be resolved on the spot?
- Can I suggest any alternative solutions?
- Is an explanation or apology appropriate?
- Will this need investigating, and if so am I the right person to do it? And if I am not, who will be?
- Is this a case that might benefit from mediation?
- Is there anything that I or another member of University staff needs to do to stop a situation reoccurring for this student or for another student?

In any case where a student is referred on to another member of staff, the person referring should make that contact and ensures the student knows who she or he has been referred to.

Where early resolution is not appropriate or possible, or where a student remains unhappy after attempts at early resolution, the student should be signposted to the formal procedure, and advised to note the time limits within that procedure, and the service offered by the Students' Union in terms of advice and support.

Where proportionate the student should be provided with a written outcome. An email to the student confirming the outcome of the discussion is often a brief and effective way of doing this. It should capture the actions taken to consider the concern, and any decision or outcome.

Referral to other University procedures

Where the subject matter of an academic appeal could be more appropriately considered through a different process, such as the University Student Complaints Procedure, the submission will be referred to the relevant procedure. In these cases the outcome will be classed as Appeal Referred and the Student Casework Manager Will notify the student and the faculty and or service that the appeal has been referred to another procedure for consideration

APPENDIX 2- UNACCEPTABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR, AND MALICIOUS, VEXATIOUS, FRIVOLOUS OR UNSUBSTANTIATED COMPLAINTS

This Policy sets out the University's approach to the relatively few complainants whose actions or behaviour it considers to be unacceptable. The term complainant includes anyone acting on behalf of a complainant or who contacts the University in connection with a complaint. The principles set out in this Policy also apply to our dealings with people other than complainants.

Whilst we understand that bringing a complaint can be a stressful experience for students, we have a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of our staff.

We are committed to dealing with all complainants fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service but we do not expect our staff to tolerate behaviour which we consider to be unacceptable, for example, any communication which is:

- abusive, offensive, defamatory or distressing;
- aggressive, threatening, coercive or intimidating;
- unreasonably persistent or demanding.

We will take action to protect our staff from such behaviour and this may include action under the University's Disciplinary Procedure.

4. Complainants can contact us by letter, email or telephone. We cannot respond to enquiries from anyone who is not named and confirmed in writing as a representative by the complainant.

5. When we consider that the behaviour of a complainant is unacceptable we will tell them why we find their behaviour unacceptable and we will ask them to change it. If the unacceptable behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict their contact in connection with the complaint.

6. The decision to restrict access will be taken by the Director of Service or Dean of Faculty in conjunction with the University Solicitor where appropriate. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options which will be considered are:

- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct;
- requesting contact in a particular form (for example letters only);
- requiring contact to take place with a named person
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times;
- asking the complainant to appoint a representative to correspond with us;
- in exceptional circumstances, invoking the procedures on malicious or vexatious complaints as outlined below.

7. We will write to tell the complainant why we believe their behaviour is unacceptable, what action we are taking and the duration of that action.

8. Where a complainant behaves unacceptably during a telephone conversation, we may as a last resort terminate the call.

9. Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which we consider to be unacceptable, we may decide to terminate contact with them. This may mean that we will not continue with the handling of their complaint.

10. Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of University staff and or students, we will consider other options, for example action under the University's disciplinary regulations (including suspension from campus), reporting the matter to the Police, or taking other legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

11. This Policy and its use will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Vexatious Complaints

1. A complaint may be deemed to be vexatious when it may or may not be the latest in a series of requests and it:
 - clearly does not have any serious purpose or value
 - is designed to cause disruption or annoyance; or gives rise to disproportionate inconvenience or expense
 - has the effect of harassing the University or any of the University's staff, or
 - can otherwise fairly be characterised as obsessive or manifestly unreasonable
2. A complaint should not be deemed vexatious simply because it causes inconvenience or expense.
3. The decision to deem a complaint vexatious must always be given in writing together with the reasons upon which the decision was based, and the University would need to be able to defend any challenge to such a decision. A Completion of Procedures letter would be issued to the student.

Frivolous Complaints

1. A complaint may be deemed to be frivolous where:
 - it is clear that it is not serious or sensible in content, attitude or behaviour.
 - there is an absence of a clear desire for redress or a sensible and realistic form of redress indicating a lack of seriousness.
 - it is reasonable to assume that there was no intention that the complaint be seen as serious or sensible or that redress was sought, but not to the extent that it can be considered vexatious or malicious.
2. A complaint should not be deemed frivolous simply because it is irritating to or inconvenient for the recipient.
3. The decision to deem a complaint frivolous must always be given in writing together with the reasons upon which the decision was based, and the University would need to be able to defend any challenge to such a decision. A Completion of Procedures letter would be issued to the student.

Malicious Complaints

1. A complaint may be deemed malicious when:
 - there is evidence of intention to do harm or mischief. This intention may be express - the complainant makes clear the intention to do harm - or implied.
 - in the absence of any clear evidence, it is reasonable to assume the complainant intended to do harm or mischief.
 - since the essence of a genuine complaint is the seeking of redress, malice may be implied where, for example, it is clear that no redress is sought.

Malice may be directed either against individual members of staff or the University as an institution.

2. A complaint should not be deemed to be malicious simply because:
 - the complainant threatens harm or mischief (e.g. to bring the University into disrepute) if demands for redress remain unsatisfied.
 - addressing complaints through the Complaints Procedure could lead to outcomes which might be embarrassing to the University or bring the University into disrepute
 - no obvious request for redress is stated
3. The decision to deem a complaint malicious must always be given in writing together with the reasons upon which the decision was based, and the University would need to be able to defend any challenge to such a decision. A Completion of Procedures letter would be issued to the student.

Unsubstantiated Complaints

1. A complaint will be unsubstantiated when, after investigation of the complaint during the course of which the complainant was given full opportunity to provide evidence in support of the complaint, no prima facia evidence had been provided to/received by the University.
2. A complaint may not be deemed unsubstantiated when, following investigation, prima facia evidence related to the complaint has been identified.
3. A decision to deem a complaint to be unsubstantiated cannot be taken before an investigation into the existence of prima facia evidence has been completed.
4. The decision to deem a complaint unsubstantiated must always be given in writing together with the reasons upon which the decision was based, and the University would need to be able to defend any challenge to such a decision. A Completion of Procedures letter would be issued to the student.

Appendix 3

Deadlines for complaints about issues of harassment by staff

You will receive a response from the Dean of Faculty or Director of Service as quickly as possible but no longer than ten working days after you have made a formal complaint.

Harassment and Respect

Harassment can be any unwanted attention or behaviour that a person finds objectionable or offensive and which makes them feel threatened or uncomfortable, leading to a loss of dignity or self-respect. It is not the intent of the harasser but the impact on the recipient that defines harassment.

Under the Equality Act 2010, harassment is defined as unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. The relevant protected characteristics are Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Race, Religion and belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation.

Bullying is harassment which is not based on race, sex or any other personal factor. As with other forms of harassment, it can be defined as words, actions or other conduct which ridicules, intimidates or threatens and affects individual dignity and well being. It may take many forms and may not be easy to recognise.

As articulated by our corporate value of [Inclusiveness](#), the University of Sunderland recognises the diverse nature of our staff and student community through a proactive approach to equality and diversity, embracing a culture of mutual respect. We do not tolerate discriminatory practices or harassment of any kind. In line with our strategic themes and our values, we work to continue to deliver a positive environment for the conduct of all our activities, where all members of our community treat one another with mutual respect and dignity.

Through our policies and practices we work to ensure that all students and staff are welcome in our community and do not face discrimination with regard to any aspect of their identity, such as race, disability, gender, age, religion and belief or sexual orientation.

The University strives to promote the health and well-being of all of our staff and students and provides a number of mechanisms to support this. These measures include our proactive approach to [equality and diversity](#), our in-house [Occupational Health](#) provision for staff and our [Health and Well-being](#) provision for students, and our [Counselling Service](#).

Appendix 4

Guide to University Procedures for Students

The University has designed policies and procedures to aid you during your time here. It is important that you are aware that these rules, policies and procedures exist and you utilise them if necessary.

To ensure that you use the correct procedure for a given situation this brief guide aims to give an overview of what each procedure relates to.

You can seek advice on how the procedures operate from The Student Casework Manager in Academic Registry, Gateway Building or further advice from the named contact within each policy.

You can seek support and guidance from the Students' Union, Academic Affairs Office based in Edinburgh Building.

If you are a student who is not based in Sunderland you can access support, guidance and advice as detailed above via email or telephone.

Policies can be viewed at

<https://my.sunderland.ac.uk/display/AQH/Programme+Regulations+and+Assessment>

Academic Appeals

You should use this if you wish to appeal against an assessment decision **and** you are able to provide evidence on one or both of the following grounds: Unconsidered Extenuating Circumstances or Material Procedural Irregularity on the part of the University.

Contact the Student Casework Manager in Academic Registry, Gateway Building, Telephone 0191 515 2941 email studentcasework@sunderland.ac.uk

For support contact the Students' Union on 0191 514 4117 or via email: su.studentadvice@sunderland.ac.uk

The Student Complaint Procedure

If you are dissatisfied with a service provided by the University or a member of staff and you have already made an attempt to resolve your problem with the Faculty or Service of University, you can make a formal complaint under the University's Student Complaints Procedure.

Contact Student Casework Manager in Academic Registry, Gateway Building Telephone 0191 515 2941 email studentcasework@sunderland.ac.uk

For support contact the Students' Union on 0191 515 3030 or via email: su.studentadvice@sunderland.ac.uk

Complaints about other students will be dealt with under the policy:

Student Disciplinary Regulations

The University has Regulations governing the conduct of students, including issues such as harassment and bullying. If you feel that a student has behaved in a way which breaches these Rules, and you wish to raise this, please seek advice from Academic Services who will direct you to the appropriate senior staff within Faculty or Service who can progress your case.

Contact the Deputy Academic Registrar in Academic Registry.
Telephone 0191 515 2059 email ain.rowan@sunderland.ac.uk

Or contact The Student Casework Manager in Academic Registry, Gateway Building
Telephone 0191 515 2941 email studentcasework@sunderland.ac.uk

For support contact USSU on 0191 515 3030
or via email: su.studentadvice@sunderland.ac.uk

The Safeguarding Procedure

The University recognises its particular responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable adults present on University premises for whatever purpose by ensuring that there are appropriate policies and arrangements in place to enable it to discharge its duty to provide a safe and secure environment and to deal with issues concerned with suspected/or reported abuse. The University has a Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults, and a Safeguarding Team which has representation from every Faculty and Service. Any concerns about the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults should be reported to a member of that Team (Faculty and Service general offices should be able to advise a concerned student or member of staff as to the relevant member of that Team).
<http://services.sunderland.ac.uk/hr/hs&e/safeguarding/>

The Fitness to Practise Procedure

The University operates a number of professional programmes where students must demonstrate skills and standards of professional behaviour as well as academic ability, and issues from time to time arise over whether a student's behaviour or health gives cause for concern about their fitness or suitability to practise in the professional area concerned. The University also operates programmes where students engage with placement activity, for which similar concerns may arise about a student's fitness or suitability to participate in that activity.

In either case, these concerns might not be of a kind which would prevent a student from continuing studies on campus, but the University has a responsibility to those members of the public who come into contact with students on placement, to its partners in placement and professional practise, and to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies to ensure that where they arise in a professional or placement context, such concerns are dealt with. The University has developed Fitness to Practise Regulations which govern how such concerns are dealt with.

Contact the Deputy Academic Registrar, Academic Registry.
Telephone 0191 515 2059 email iain.rowan@sunderland.ac.uk

For support contact USSU on 0191 515 3030
or via email: su.studentadvice@sunderland.ac.uk

Academic Misconduct Regulations

If an allegation of plagiarism or other infringement is made against you this will be dealt with under the Academic Misconduct Regulations. This is dealt with by a central Panel in Academic Registry. If you need advice in a case of alleged Academic Misconduct, you can the Students' Union for advice. Telephone 0191 515 3030 or via email su.studentadvice@sunderland.ac.uk

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistle Blowing procedure)

Is accessible here

<http://services.sunderland.ac.uk/images/2012.02.28%20Whistleblowing%20Policy.pdf>

Guidance Notes for Students

Making a complaint

- 1) Ensure that you have read the student complaint procedure, making note of the circumstances in which you cannot use the complaints procedure;
- 2) If you wish to pursue a formal complaint then you must complete an official Complaint Form, sign and date the form, then submit it to studentcasework@sunderland.ac.uk. Please see Section K1 of the Student Complaint Procedure for information on where to obtain this form and where to go for help in completing it;
- 3) You should retain a copy of the completed form and any evidence you submit with it;
- 4) If a group of students wish to raise a complaint it is acceptable for this to be done in one or two student names (please refer to Section A point 11) The named student must undertake to inform other students who are party to the complaint of any responses received from the University. Included with the complaint should be a list of all students who are party to the complaint and must include their full name, university registration number and a contact email address as well as signing to say that they support the content of the complaint and they agree to their name being submitted as part of the complaint;
- 5) It is important to be clear and concise when completing your complaint form, and to provide any evidence which supports your claims. You must state what you wish the outcome of your complaint to be;
- 6) This is a confidential process but if the complaint is about a member of staff they will be told of the complaint and its content;
- 7) You should make your complaint in good faith. If you make a complaint which you know to be untrue, unfounded or malicious you are likely to be disciplined. You should note the policy on unacceptable complainant behaviour in Appendix 2;
- 8) If at any point the subject of the complaint becomes part of a police investigation the complaints process will be suspended until such time as the police investigation has been completed;
- 9) If you start legal proceedings against the University, any complaint will be paused until those proceedings are complete.
- 10) Please note that the University is not able to accept a complaint from a third party on your behalf – for example from your parents or spouse. If the University receives a complaint from a third party they will be told that the student must raise the issue themselves. Occasionally a student who may be incapacitated, through illness for example, may request that their nominee act on their behalf with the University;
- 11) If after reading these notes and the procedure you are still unsure what to do please contact the Student Casework Manager on 0191 515 2941 casework@sunderland.ac.uk or the Students' Union on 0191 515 3030.