Student Complaints Procedure

Responsibility of: University Secretary
Approval date: September 2016
Reviewed: May 2018
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Approved by: Academic Board/Board of Governors
1 General Principles

1.1 The University seeks to maintain high standards in its provision of courses, services and facilities to students. The University has established its student complaints procedures to deal with legitimate complaints from students in a fair, prompt and efficient manner.

1.2 Complaints will be addressed through a three stage process. Stage I: Informal Resolution of Complaints; Stage II: Formal Complaints Procedure; and Stage III: Review.

1.3 All complaints will be dealt with without recrimination and no student will be disadvantaged on account of raising a complaint. Students may complain individually or collectively, where appropriate. Complaints will be investigated objectively. Anonymous complaints will not be accepted.

1.4 Students should normally make a formal complaint within 20 days of the outcome of an informal complaint or, in the case of serious issues, of the event leading to the complaint. The University will only consider complaints outside this timeframe at its absolute discretion and where there is valid reason for the delay.

1.5 All complaints will be dealt with constructively and the student will be informed of the outcome. Where a complaint is upheld, the University will make an appropriate response including taking any necessary corrective action. Means of redress include an explanation of actions taken or planned and written or oral apologies.

1.6 All complaints will be dealt with in confidence with the proviso that any person about whom a complaint is made shall be supplied with a copy of the complaint. A student may be asked to attend an interview with the member of staff investigating their complaint.

1.7 A record of Stage II complaints received from students and the means of resolution will be kept by the University Secretary and reported annually to the Academic Board as part of the University’s monitoring and quality assurance processes. No information that will identify any individual will be available within the report.

1.8 A student may seek advice from the Students’ Union when making a complaint and may be accompanied by another student or a representative, for example an officer of the Students’ Union, in any meeting that takes place in connection with a complaint he/she has lodged. However, under no circumstances may the student be represented by an external organisation. Under no circumstances shall the costs be re-claimable save for expenses in exceptional cases.

1.9 For students under the age of 18 additional support may be provided.

1.10 Where a complaint made by a student is believed to be frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice, the University reserves the right to take disciplinary action against the student for breach of the Code of Conduct. This will be investigated as a potential breach of Section 3.2. of the Code:

Respect other members’ basic rights to work and live in a safe, secure environment, free from anxiety, fear, intimidation and harassment.
1.11 Advice on whether the complaints procedure applies and how it operates may be sought from the University Secretary or their nominee, or the Students' Union.

1.12 Where a complaint is upheld, the University will reimburse the student upon production of receipts for incidental expenses (eg travel and subsistence) that have been necessarily incurred by the student in the resolution of their complaint. If a complaint is not upheld the student will be informed of the reason(s) for that decision. The University may in its discretion reimburse the student upon production of receipts for incidental expenses necessarily incurred by the student in putting forward their complaint if satisfied that the complaint was made in good faith.

2 Scope of the Complaints Procedure

2.1 This procedure is designed to deal with complaints arising from:

i) provision of academic services described in the University’s publications including teaching, content of courses, support for learning

ii) incorrect or misleading information about services provided by the University

iii) provision of other University services described in literature published by the University

2.2 The student complaints procedure does not cover the following:

i) any matters relating to examination and assessment procedures or academic appeals. Information regarding the Appeals System is published

ii) disciplinary issues. Information regarding breaches of the Code of Conduct is published in the Student handbook.

iii) admissions procedures prior to enrolment as a student of the University. Information regarding complaints about the Admissions Process is published on the website www.uwl.ac.uk/admissionspolicy.

iv) complaints about the Students’ Union. Information regarding complaints about the Students’ Union is published on the Students’ Union website www.uwlsu.com.

v) complaints about student accommodation that is not University owned and/or controlled. Information about how to make a complaint can be obtained from the Notting Hill Housing.

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

3 Stage I: Informal resolution of complaints

3.1 If a student requires advice or wishes to discuss the matter before making a complaint he/she should consult his/her personal tutor, a student representative or an officer of the Students’ Union.

3.2 The complaint may be made orally or in writing, normally within ten working days of the incident or action form which the complaint arises, or in any event as soon as possible.

3.3 Most complaints will normally be resolved informally by an appropriate member of staff.

3.4 The member of staff to whom the complaint is made will investigate or refer the complaint. A response will be made to the student via email, normally within ten working days.

3.5 If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of this informal procedure, then they should follow the procedures described in the formal complaints procedure below.

4 Stage II: Formal complaints procedure

4.1 A complaint under this procedure should be made to the University Secretary, in writing, normally within twenty working days of the incident or action from which the complaint arises, or the outcome of the informal resolution.

The following details must be provided:

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

The complaint should be addressed to the
4.2 The University Secretary will determine whether all the necessary information has been provided and may contact the student requesting additional details and evidence. In all cases, the University Secretary will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days.

4.3 The University Secretary will forward the complaint to the appropriate area(s) who will investigate the complaint using the information provided by the student in their written statement of the complaint. A response, detailing the investigation, will be sent to the student in writing within twenty-five working days of the full complaint being acknowledged by the University. The response sent to the student must be copied to the University Secretary and all relevant parties (including the Students’ Union where applicable).

4.4 In instances where it has not been possible to resolve the complaint within 25 working days for a legitimate reason, the relevant area investigating the complaint shall write to the student and inform them of:

- The name of the person investigating their complaint
- The reason for the delay
- The date by which the student will be notified of the outcome

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

5 Stage III: Review (Completion Of Procedures)

5.1 If a student has reason to believe that his/her complaint has not been handled fairly, objectively or in accordance with the procedures described above, he/she should write to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) within fifteen working days of the date of the outcome letter, setting out his/her reasons.

5.2 A stage 3 complaint constitutes a review and not a re-investigation of the complaint. The request for a review must state the grounds on which the review is sought and should be accompanied by appropriate documentary evidence. Valid grounds for the review of the stage two investigation outcome are as follows:

- There were procedural irregularities in the investigation of the complaint; or
- Fresh evidence can be presented which could not reasonably have been made available with submission of the Stage Two Form; or
• The outcome of the investigation was not reasonable in all the circumstances.

5.3 On the instruction of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, his/her nominee will review the handling of the complaint in the light of the student’s written statement and report in writing to the Pro Vice-Chancellor. The Pro Vice-Chancellor may confirm or rescind an earlier decision in the light of this report. The Pro Vice-Chancellor will send a written reply, in the form of a Completion of Procedures letter, to the student within 20 working days of receiving the request for the review of the handling of the complaint. The Completion of Procedures letter exhausts the University’s internal procedures. There will be no further opportunity to pursue the complaint within the University.

6 Referral to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator

6.1 If the student remains dissatisfied with the written response they have received, the student may refer their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for external review. Further information on the procedure can be found on the OIA’s website: www.oiahe.org.uk. Guidance can also be sought from the Students’ Union.