

## Management of complaints received via the public complaints email address

<b>Policy Category:</b>	Governance
<b>Subject:</b>	Complaints
<b>Approved by:</b>	Professional Service Management Group
<b>Policy Owner:</b>	Vice President Governance and External Affairs & Registrar
<b>Policy Lead:</b>	Information Compliance Manager
<b>Related Procedures:</b>	
<b>Related University Policies:</b>	University Conduct Regulations; Academic Appeals
<b>Related Legislation:</b>	Public Services Ombudsman (Northern Ireland) Act 2016
<b>Effective Date:</b>	1 June 2025
<b>Supersedes:</b>	N/A
<b>Next Review:</b>	May 2027

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### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 Queen's University Belfast ("the University") is committed to ensuring a high-quality education and pastoral experience. However, there may be occasions where individuals feel dissatisfied with the services provided, or with the way the University, its staff or students have acted or omitted to act.
- 1.2 In such circumstances the individual has the right to complain.
- 1.3 A complaint may be defined as "a statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable".<sup>1</sup>
- 1.4 This policy sets out how an individual may make a complaint via the public complaints email and the University's commitment to ensuring that issues are resolved quickly and effectively.
- 1.5 The Policy is aligned with the [Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Statement of Principles for complaints standards and improvement](#)<sup>2</sup>.

### 2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy will apply to all complaints and/or compliments received from a student, staff member, external customer, member of public or third-party stakeholder via the public complaints email address where that issue cannot be resolved under the following processes:
  - Academic appeals
  - Accommodation
  - Admissions and Access
  - Conduct Regulations
  - Grievance
  - Student Complaints Regulations

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<sup>1</sup> [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)

<sup>2</sup> <file:///C:/Users/3053842/Downloads/Statement%20of%20Principles.pdf>

- Whistleblowing
- 2.2 Where a complaint falls within one of these policies and/or procedures, a member of staff will advise what action should be taken in order to seek resolution.
- 2.3 The following will also not be considered as a complaint under this policy:
- Service requests – a routine first-time request for a service or reporting of a fault.
  - A request for an internal review following a freedom of information or environmental information request.

### 3. Formal complaints

- 3.1 A complaint may be made via the public complaints email – [publiccomplaints@qub.ac.uk](mailto:publiccomplaints@qub.ac.uk)
- 3.2 A complaint will be accepted from a third party acting on behalf of a complainant where evidence of authority to act is provided e.g. power of attorney, written explicit consent.
- 3.3 A complaint should be submitted to the University via [publiccomplaints@qub.ac.uk](mailto:publiccomplaints@qub.ac.uk) no later than three months from the date the issue arose. The University will apply discretion in relation to extending this timescale.
- 3.4 All formal complaints will be logged.
- 3.5 Complaint investigations will be conducted by the relevant responsible person. For the purposes of this policy that is the person appointed to investigate the complaint.
- 3.6 The University will respond to complaints in line with timeframes detailed below:

		Responsible for action
Acknowledgement	3 working days <sup>3</sup> from receipt of complaint	Information Compliance Unit
Response or request for further clarification/information	10 working days from receipt of complaint	Relevant Responsible Person to draft response.  Response forwarded to Information Compliance Unit to send from <a href="mailto:public.complaints@qub.ac.uk">public.complaints@qub.ac.uk</a>  (Please see 3.8 below)
Response following clarification/information	10 working days from receipt of clarification/information	Relevant responsible person  Copy to Information Compliance Unit

- 3.7 The University will aim to respond to a formal complaint within a maximum of 20 working days. If the University is unable to respond to the complaint within this timeframe the complainant must be advised as soon as possible and provided with a revised timescale.
- 3.8 Prior to issuing the response the Information Compliance Unit will seek approval to do so from the Associate Vice-President for Operations and Special Projects. Should any amendments be

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<sup>3</sup> Working days are those days on which the University is open. Weekends, statutory and bank holidays, and University closure days are not classed as working days.

required to the response, e.g. to meet legislative responsibilities, the Relevant Responsible Person will be directed to implement those amendments.

- 3.9 The Information Compliance Unit will ensure that the complainant is aware of their right to appeal if not already included in the response.

#### 4. Appeals

- 4.1 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the University's response they may request an appeal by writing to [publiccomplaints@qub.ac.uk](mailto:publiccomplaints@qub.ac.uk) or The Chancellery, Queen's University Belfast, University Road, Belfast Northern Ireland, BT7 1NN
- 4.2 An appeal will be considered by a staff member(s) with no previous connection with the original complaint. The individual(s) appointed to consider the appeal will depend on the nature of the complaint and the appeal lodged.
- 4.3 The University will respond to appeals in line with the timeframes detailed below:

		Responsible for action
Acknowledgement	3 working days <sup>4</sup> from receipt of complaint	Information Compliance Unit
Response or request for further clarification/information	10 working days from receipt of complaint	Officer considering appeal Response forwarded to Information Compliance Unit to send from <a href="mailto:public.complaints@qub.ac.uk">public.complaints@qub.ac.uk</a> Please see 4.5 below
Response following clarification/information	10 working days from receipt of clarification/information	Officer considering appeal Copy to Information Compliance Unit

- 4.4 The University will aim to respond to an appeal within a maximum of 20 working days. If the University is unable to respond to the appeal within this timeframe the complainant must be advised as soon as possible and provided with a revised timescale.
- 4.5 Prior to issuing the appeal response the Information Compliance Unit will seek approval to do so from the Associate Vice-President for Operations and Special Projects. Should any amendments be required to the appeal response, e.g. to meet legislative responsibilities, the Officer who considered the appeal will be advised accordingly.
- 4.5 If following the formal complaint and appeal process the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, and they are a student or previous student, they have the right to raise the issue with the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman (NIPSO) within six months of the final response.
- 4.6 NIPSO may be contacted:
- Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House

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<sup>4</sup> Working days are those days on which the University is open. Weekends, statutory and bank holidays, and University closure days are not classed as working days.

33 Wellington Place  
Belfast BT1 6HN

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email : [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

4.7 The Information Compliance Unit will ensure the complainant is made aware of their right to contact NIPSO where they are eligible to do so.

4.8 Complaints made by individuals who are not a student or previous student cannot raise the complaint with NIPSO<sup>5</sup>.

## **5. Outcomes**

5.1 Where a complaint is upheld, you will receive an apology and explanation. If possible, the mistake will be corrected and a satisfactory level of service provided as a matter of urgency.

5.2 In some cases it will not be possible to correct the mistake. In those circumstances the University will consider the following:

- Change in policy or procedure
- In-kind compensation
- Financial compensation (in exceptional circumstances where personal hardship or financial loss can be demonstrated).

5.3 Where a complaint is not upheld the complainant will receive an explanation setting out the University's reasons for not upholding the complaint.

## **6. Anonymous complaints**

6.1 The University recognises that there may be circumstances where a complainant may wish to remain anonymous and the University will respect their reasons for doing so. However, the University will exercise discretion in deciding whether to investigate an anonymous complaint.

6.2 In determining whether to investigate an anonymous complaint the University will consider the following:

- Has sufficient information been provided to undertake an investigation?
- How serious/credible is the complaint?
- Have similar complaints been made previously?
- Can the complaint be verified by other sources?

## **7. Unacceptable behaviour**

7.1 The University accepts that making a complaint can be a stressful situation and may lead individuals to act in a way in which they would not ordinarily behave. However, there may be exceptional circumstances where a complainant, either individually or collectively as part of a group/campaign, acts in a way which is unacceptable.

7.2 Behaviour which may be considered unacceptable (in the University's absolute discretion) includes:

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<sup>5</sup> [Public Services Ombudsman \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2016](#)

- Aggressive and/or abusive behaviour
  - Unreasonable demands
  - Unreasonable persistence
- 7.3 Any threat of violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards University staff will lead to a termination of all contact, the complaint will not be investigated and may be reported to the Police.
- 7.4 Where a complainant is demonstrating unacceptable behaviour, a decision may be taken to restrict contact with the complainant e.g. appointing a single point of contact, only accepting written communication etc.
- 7.5 The University will retain its discretion in relation to the most appropriate approach and will advise the complainant accordingly.