

Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. The Committee for Ministry (hereafter 'CfM') welcomes and encourages feedback on its learning programmes. Complaints are seen as part of the processes used to ensure that high standards and quality are maintained. CfM is committed to maintaining an environment where its staff, tutors and students can interact in an atmosphere of acceptance, civility, and mutual respect for one another.
2. It is generally recognized that in any group of people complaints may originate because of misunderstandings, missed communications, perceived injustices, unanswered or incorrectly answered questions or minor problems that have been neglected. The purpose of this policy is to provide a means to allow complaints to be resolved at the closest point to their origin. This policy aims to demonstrate the commitment of all involved to the principle of equality of opportunity and fair treatment for all.
3. A formal complaint process is normally only activated after an effort has been made to resolve the issue informally. Attempts to resolve an issue at local level between the parties concerned should always be the first thing attempted. However if all attempts to resolve an issue between the individuals concerned have failed then the formal, Stage 2, procedure may be activated.
4. Students who have a complaint to make should follow the procedure below:
 - (i) **for minor matters in relation to module or programme design and delivery:** students should speak with their local Course Leader or equivalent in the first instance.
 - (ii) **for matters of significance relating to any staff member or tutor:** students should contact by telephone or in writing the Director of Ministry. (In the event of the complaint relating to the Director of Ministry they should contact the Chair of the Committee for Ministry. This arrangement is implicit in the remainder of this document.)
 - (iii) **students who wish to make a complaint about a fellow student:** if the matter cannot be resolved student-to-student, the student who wishes to make a complaint should contact the Director of Ministry by telephone or in writing.
5. As matters that are dealt with informally at an early stage have the best chance of being resolved effectively, the formal stage of this procedure should only be applied if informal procedures have been exhausted and the complainant remains dissatisfied.
6. It is recognised, however, that there may be occasions when an informal approach is not appropriate. In such instances the student may wish to proceed to a formal stage in the procedure, giving reasons for doing so. In such situations the recipient of the complaint should decide at which stage in the procedure set out below the complaint should most appropriately be considered, taking account of its particular nature and circumstances.
7. In respect of particularly serious complaints, the student may write directly to the Director of Ministry without having followed the informal or formal stages of this procedure set out below. In such cases the Director shall decide whether or not to conduct his or her own investigation into the complaint or whether it should more appropriately be referred to an earlier stage in the procedure.

8. Every reasonable effort will be made to deal promptly and efficiently with all complaints, to investigate them thoroughly, objectively and independently and to seek to resolve them satisfactorily. If a complaint is upheld, CfM will seek to provide an appropriate response and will correct any mistakes or misunderstandings and will take any other action as appropriate. If a complaint is not upheld, reasons for that decision will be given in a timely manner.
9. All complaints will be dealt with in confidence with the proviso that enquiries will have to be made to investigate the matters that are the subject of the complaint. An individual against whom a complaint is made has the right to be supplied with a copy of the complaint and to comment on it. A complaint cannot be investigated if the student does not wish the substance of the allegation to be made known to the individual concerned.
10. CfM will treat complaints seriously and will deal with them without recrimination.
11. Where a complaint is shown to be frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice, it will be dismissed and disciplinary action may be taken against the student.
12. The time limits set out in this procedure will normally be followed. However, where, for good reason, this is not possible, the complainant will be kept informed of progress.
13. **'Complaints'** can relate to any aspect of the approved academic provision including (but not restricted to) complaints from students concerning their experience of the arrangements for, or delivery of, teaching or assessment; the adequacy of supervision; the academic support that is part of the programme; administrative or support services that relate to the academic programme; information or publicity in relation to the academic programme; and the infrastructure for academic programmes. This is not an exhaustive list.
14. Students registered on a University of Chester programme of study should in the first instance use the mechanisms and procedures set out here as provided by the Committee for Ministry (CfM) and should exhaust these procedures. Where appropriate, CfM staff may at any point refer relevant matters for consideration to appropriate persons at the University.
15. Where a complaint has been investigated by CfM and all the procedures in this document have been exhausted and the Complainant remains dissatisfied, the Complaint may refer the matter to the University for consideration under the Review Stage of the University's Student Complaints Procedure.
16. This procedure detailed in this document does not extend to **'academic appeals'** (i.e. appeals relating to examinations or assessments or to academic progress or against expulsion or exclusion on academic grounds). Students cannot appeal against academic judgement, i.e. a person cannot appeal simply because s/he is unhappy with a mark awarded. Students on courses validated by the University of Chester can find information on the University's approach to academic appeals in the *University Calendar, General Regulation VII - Academic Appeals*.

17. It is expected that the student concerned will pursue the complaint personally; complaints submitted by a third party will not normally be accepted.
18. The effectiveness of any complaints procedure depends on the investigating officer being able to collect appropriate information from the parties involved in order to investigate the matter properly. For this reason, anonymous complaints will not be dealt with under this procedure. It is at the discretion of the person receiving an anonymous complaint to determine how the matter is handled.

19. Stage 1: Informal Stage

20. Most complaints can be resolved informally and, where practicable, a complaint should be dealt with as close as possible to the point at which it arises. A student who wishes to complain should, therefore, initially discuss the matter with those directly responsible. If the student is unhappy about approaching the person directly responsible, they may seek counsel from their Course Leader or the Director of Ministry, if the complaint is about their Course Leader.
21. Students should raise a complaint no more than 28 days after the event that the complaint concerns unless there is good reason for the delay.
22. The Director of Ministry, or another designated officer, should if, possible, have a face-to-face discussion with the student concerned, to come to an understanding of the exact nature of the student's dissatisfaction and to explore what outcome the student seeks.
23. If appropriate, the Director of Ministry, or designated officer, should initiate mediation as part of the informal resolution.
24. Wherever possible, student complaints should be resolved at this informal level, without the need to resort to formal proceedings. A student should normally expect to receive a written or verbal acknowledgement within ten working days and a full response within twenty working days of receipt of the complaint.
25. At the conclusion of any informal resolution attempts, the student will be informed of the formal complaint procedure (Stage 2).

26. Stage 2: Formal Stage

27. If the Stage 1 procedures have been exhausted, and the student is not satisfied with the response, he or she may initiate a formal complaint to the Director of Ministry, using the complaints form which is part of this policy (see below).
28. If a complaint is received at Stage 2, without prior consideration at Stage 1, CfM will normally try to resolve the complaint using informal mechanisms in the first instance where appropriate.
29. The information to be included in the complaint by the student is as follows:

- a. details of the complaint;
 - b. a statement of the action already taken to try and resolve the complaint informally and why the response given is considered unsatisfactory;
 - c. any supporting information or evidence;
 - d. the form of resolution or redress sought.
30. CfM will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within ten working days. An Investigating Officer will be appointed to examine the issues.
31. The person dealing with the formal complaint, 'the Investigating Officer,' must be independent both of the source and the subject of the complaint and will either investigate the matter him or herself or will delegate responsibility to another appropriate person to undertake the investigation on his or her behalf.
32. The person dealing with the formal complaint will seek resolution of the complaint by a means appropriate to its nature and circumstance. Such means may include:
- a. correspondence between the parties;
 - b. negotiation with the student or with appropriate members of staff or with both;
 - c. facilitation of a conciliation meeting between the student and student/staff concerned;
 - d. facilitation of a mediation meeting between the student and student/staff concerned.
33. If the person dealing with the formal complaint decides to investigate the complaint via correspondence, the student bringing forward the complaint will be sent a copy of any comments obtained during this process and will be invited to submit a response. This will be done prior to a decision being reached in relation to the complaint.
34. Stage 2 should normally be completed and a written response sent to the student, within eight weeks of the complaint at this stage being received.
35. The possible outcomes from the Stage 2 process include:
- a. a resolution, reached in co-operation with the student, following conciliation or mediation if appropriate;
 - b. if the complaint is upheld, a recommendation will be made outlining how the issue(s) identified in the complaint should be addressed including, if applicable, appropriate redress to the student;
 - c. dismissal of the complaint with reasons given to the student in writing.
36. The response will also inform the student of their right to request a review of the complaint by the University. Dissatisfaction with the outcome of the stage 1 and 2 processes is not sufficient grounds for a Complainant to request a review by a University Complaints Review officer. The only grounds for such a request are that:
- a. The Investigating Officer has not responded to all the substantive areas of the complaint; or
 - b. There was procedural irregularity in connection with the determination by the Investigating officer; or
 - c. New evidence has come to light which was not, with reasonable diligence, obtainable by the Complainant at Stage 2; or
 - d. The findings of the CfM investigation are not reasonable in all circumstances.



This form should be used if you wish to submit a formal complaint to the Committee for Ministry. Students using the form should consult CfM's *Student Complaints Policy and Procedure*. When completing this form you are asked to note that you are expected to have made an effort to resolve your complaint informally in accordance with the *Student Complaints Policy and Procedure*. Consequentially, this form asks for details of the action you have taken to resolve the complaint informally and why you remain dissatisfied.

STUDENT DETAILS

Name:

Programme of study and level of study:

Contact Address:

Telephone number:

Email address:

(These are the contact details that will be used whilst your complaint is ongoing)

DETAILS OF COMPLAINT (expand boxes or continue on another piece of paper as needed)

1. Please detail below the nature of your complaint setting out the context in which it arose and including details of incidents or events if appropriate. Copies of relevant documents should also be included:

2. Please set out what action you have taken to date to resolve your complaint informally. Copies of relevant documents should also be included:

3. Please explain why you are not satisfied with the response you received at the informal stage:

4. Please indicate what action you wish to see taken to address your complaint:

DECLARATION

I confirm that I have read and followed the *Student Complaints Policy and Procedure*, and that this complaint is submitted after the informal stage (Stage 1) of the *Student Complaints Policy and Procedure* has been completed.

Note: In order to investigate your complaint fully, any member of staff mentioned in the complaint will be made aware of the issues raised and will have an opportunity to comment on them.

Signed:

Date

