

Student Complaint Management Procedure



1 Purpose

To establish the process for the management of Complaints made by Students.

2 Scope

This procedure applies to all Complaints, including Complaints which may be also classified as allegations, made by Students or their Authorised Representative.

Exclusions:

This procedure does not apply to:

- Complaints made by Employees or members of the public in relation to Student conduct. For these Complaints please refer to the Student Code of Conduct Policy.
- Student Complaint Types handled in accordance with other University Policies and Procedures in accordance with the Student Complaint Type and Responsibilities Schedule.
- Appeals.

3 Procedure Overview

The Student Complaint Management Procedure establishes the process for managing Complaints made by Students, in line with the University's commitment to natural justice and procedural fairness. The University will uphold appropriate standards throughout the Complaint Management process.

4 Procedures

4.1 Seeking help and support services

For information on where to seek help in the first instance, refer to the University's [Feedback, Complaints and Appeals](#) system.

Students who are considering making a Complaint may seek assistance and support from University support services, Student representative organisations or Mediation services. These

include but are not limited to:

1. a Psychologist, Counsellor or Disability Support Officer from Student Services
2. an Advocacy Officer from the Student Guild
3. a language interpreter
4. a Student Relationship Officer
5. Mediation support. Independent Mediation is available through the Dispute Resolution Branch, Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

4.2 Authority to Act

Students who would like an Authorised Representative to act on their behalf in relation to making a Formal Complaint must arrange official permission with the University in accordance with the Student Authority to Act Procedure.

4.3 Making an Informal Complaint

The University encourages Students to try to resolve their problem or concern informally in the first instance.

Any Student may raise an issue informally or provide constructive feedback at any time by contacting their Student Relationship Officer or via email to the Student Experience mailbox provided on the Student Complaints and Appeals Management System. Other ways to raise issues informally are face to face with the relevant University Employee or section, by telephone or email, or in writing.

Many problems or concerns tend to arise through misunderstandings and in most cases, they are best dealt with quickly and informally with the person concerned. It is important that the Student provide as much detail as possible about the issue when they first raise it to facilitate an informal resolution.

When raising a problem or concern, it is important to give full details and advise a preferred outcome or desired resolution. This will help the Investigating Officer make sure the problem or concern is dealt with under the correct process. Students are also encouraged to disclose any underlying personal or other issues that may have contributed to, or exacerbated, the problem or concern. This will help the Investigating Officer to try to approach the Student's problem or concern in a more holistic way, including referral of the Student to other forms of support and assistance.

If an attempt at informal resolution of the issue is not successful, or a Student does not feel comfortable seeking informal resolution, the Student can make a Formal Complaint.

The University recognises that from time to time, problems or concerns are raised by Students, however the University is only able to investigate problems or concerns which meet the University's definition of Complaint.

The University recognises that some issues are not able to be resolved informally. Where a Student makes an Informal Complaint in an attempt to resolve the issue, the Investigating Officer receiving the Informal Complaint may determine that the matter is sufficiently serious, recommend that the issue be considered as a Formal Complaint and referred to the appropriate delegate in accordance with the relevant Policy and/or Procedure.

4.4 Making a Formal Complaint

If a Student feels uncomfortable about having their Complaint dealt with informally, or has not been able to resolve it informally, they can choose to have their Complaint dealt with formally.

All Formal Complaints must be made by the Student, their Authorised Representative, or an Investigating Officer.

Students can make a Formal Complaint, including anonymous Complaints, at any time by using the University's Student Complaints and Appeals Management System:

<https://www.usq.edu.au/complaints-appeals>

Students who request a copy of the Student Complaint and Appeal Policy and this Procedure will be referred to the University's Policy Library to access the current version of these documents.

All Formal Complaints submitted to the University should include:

1. a description of the Complaint and when or where it happened. This should be brief and to the point; and
2. whether the Student has already spoken with someone (such as an Employee) about the Complaint or taken any other action to resolve their Complaint informally; and
3. copies of any relevant documentation or correspondence; and
4. what outcome is being sought by the Student.

All Formal Complaints should be made within 12 months of the incident or issue occurring. Students normally will not suffer any form of disadvantage as a result of making a Complaint. However, the making of vexatious or frivolous Complaints may result in the Student's conduct being investigated, and may also result in disciplinary action, under the Student Code of Conduct Policy.

4.5 Receipt of a Formal Complaint

Formal Complaints received will be recorded within the University's Student Complaints and Appeals Management System.

Investigating Officers who receive a Formal Complaint that has not been made via the Online Formal Complaint Form must arrange for the Formal Complaint to be uploaded in the University's Student Complaints and Appeals Management System. A member of the University's Complaint handling team will undertake an assessment using the criteria set out in these procedures to assign the Complaint Type and progress accordingly.

4.6 Acknowledgement of a Formal Complaint

A Student who makes a Formal Complaint will receive a Notice of receipt, usually within three University Business Days.

The University will aim to resolve all Complaints in a fair, impartial, consistent, respectful and timely manner.

4.7 Tracking of Formal Complaint

The progress of all Formal Complaints is recorded and tracked within the University's Student Complaints and Appeals Management System and by mandatory regular system reports to the Accountable Officer.

Should the investigation take longer than the recommended 15 University Business Days, Students will be kept informed by the Investigating Officer as to the progress of their Formal Complaint and the steps being taken to resolve it.

Wherever possible, steps will be taken to safeguard the confidentiality of any information provided as part of the Complaints management process.

4.8 Initial assessment of the Formal Complaint

Initial assessment of a Formal Complaint will be made using the University's Student Complaints and Appeals Management System and will usually commence within three University Business Days of receipt of the Formal Complaint.

If an initial assessment determines that a matter does not meet the University's definition of Complaint, the relevant Investigating Officer will send a Notice to the Student:

- referring them to an alternative or more appropriate pathway for resolution; and/or
- advising the Student that the issue they have raised does not constitute a Complaint.

This Formal Complaint status will be updated in the Student Complaints and Appeals Management System.

If an initial assessment determines that the matter is a Complaint, it will be referred to an appropriate Investigating Officer for investigation in accordance with the Student Complaints Type and Responsibilities Schedule, or to the most appropriate Investigating Officer as determined by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services).

If an initial assessment determines that the nature of a Formal Complaint spans multiple Complaint Types, the Formal Complaint may progress down multiple pathways at the same time. For example a Formal Complaint which is also an allegation of misconduct will be assigned to an Investigating Officer to coordinate all communications with the Student.

4.9 Referral of Formal Complaint to the appropriate pathway for resolution

Formal Complaints will be assigned to an appropriate Investigating Officer for the relevant Complaint Type as per the Student Complaint Type and Responsibilities Schedule.

Each Investigating Officer will be responsible for recording the progress of the Formal Complaint within the Student Complaints and Appeals Management System, as well as providing Notice to the Student if the matter has been referred to another relevant delegate for internal review

Investigating Officers also reserve the right to refer complex matters to external agencies, as appropriate, for review.

4.10 Investigation of Formal Complaint

Investigation of the Formal Complaint will be undertaken in accordance with the processes set out in the relevant policy/ies and/or procedure/s for the relevant Complaint Type as set out in the Student Complaint Type and Responsibilities Schedule, or by the most appropriate Investigating Officer as determined by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services).

Where a Formal Complaint is classified as more than one Complaint Type and is referred to more than one process for resolution, it is the responsibility of the Investigating Officers involved in those processes to maintain communication throughout the investigation process and to provide coordinated communication with the Student in relation to the matter from a single point of contact.

All parties involved in the Formal Complaint management process will be kept informed, where appropriate, in writing, of progress or Decisions, including reasons for the Decision.

Where it is recommended that Mediation occur between parties or a meeting or hearing be held, the Student will be given Notice of a date, time and location. Students may choose to bring with them to meetings or hearings a support person or advocate of their choice who neither holds a law degree nor is permitted to practice law.

The University adopts strategies for dealing with unreasonable complainant conduct in accordance with the Queensland Ombudsman's Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Practice Manual.

4.11 Decision

4.11.1 Formal Complaint

At the conclusion of the investigation process, a Decision will be reached by the relevant Investigating Officer in relation to the Formal Complaint in accordance with the processes set out in the relevant policy/ies and/or procedure/s for the relevant Complaint Type.

All Formal Complaints will be resolved as soon as reasonably possible and usually within 15 University Business Days from the date of receipt of the Complaint.

The University recognises that complex issues involving multiple parties normally take longer to resolve in order to ensure a fair and equitable outcome is achieved. Should the investigation take longer than the recommended 15 University Business Days, Students will be kept informed as to the progress of their Formal Complaint and the steps being taken to resolve it.

4.11.2 Internal review

If a Student is dissatisfied with the Decision of their Formal Complaint, the Student has the right to request an internal review, which will normally be undertaken by a senior member of the section, School or Faculty.

If the Student is still dissatisfied with the Decision and the matter is unable to be resolved, further investigation will be undertaken by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services) or other suitable, relevant nominee as Delegate. The Decision of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services) or Delegate is the final level of internal review.

Where a Student has requested an internal review of the Decision, the matter will be resolved as soon as reasonably possible and usually within 10 University Business Days from the date of request for internal review.

The University recognises that complex issues involving multiple parties normally takes longer to resolve in order to ensure a fair and equitable outcome is achieved. Should the internal review take longer than the recommended 10 University Business Days, Students will be kept informed as to the progress of their internal review and the steps being taken to resolve it.

4.12 Communication of Decision

Students and other parties involved in an investigation or internal review, such as Employees or other Students, will receive a Notice of the Decision of the Formal Complaint or internal review and the rationale underpinning the Decision.

The Investigating Officer will communicate the Decision by Notice to the Student and will ensure a copy of the Notice is uploaded to the Complaints and Appeals Management System.

4.13 Closure of Formal Complaint

Upon resolution, the status of the Formal Complaint will be updated as 'resolved' by the relevant Investigating Officer in the Student Complaints and Appeals Management System.

4.14 Record keeping

Officers handling/investigating a Complaint or conducting an internal review are responsible for ensuring complete and accurate recording of all material in accordance with University Policy and regulatory obligations. Records will be kept of the Complaint resolution process and outcome.

4.15 Implementation of Decision

Unless otherwise determined and recorded, all Decisions in relation to Formal Complaints will be implemented with immediate effect.

Where a Decision has been made to restrict, suspend, cancel or terminate the Enrolment of a Student, the University will maintain the Student's Enrolment during any internal review or Appeals process. Students who have been Excluded in accordance with Section 6.1 Emergency Power to Exclude, in the Student Code of Conduct Policy, will not have their Enrolment maintained during the internal review or Appeal process.

Where a Decision has been made by the University that supports the Student, the University will, as soon as reasonably practicable, implement the Decision and/or corrective/preventative action required and advise the Student by Notice of the Decision.

All Formal Complaints will be used as part of the University's process of continuous improvement and where an outcome identifies an error in process, this will be addressed as part of the resolution phase in order to prevent the issue re-occurring in future.

4.16 Reporting

The Accountable Officer will be responsible for including a statement within the University's Annual Report of Formal Complaints received and Decisions reached.

The Accountable Officer will prepare an annual report on Formal Complaints for submission through the Vice-Chancellor to Academic Board, the Chancellor's Committee and Council. The Accountable Officer, at their discretion, may provide a copy of the University's Complaint Management Report to other appropriate stakeholders.

Reports may include:

- number and type of Complaints received
- timeframes for assessment and action
- the Faculty or School in which the Student is Enrolled
- Whether the Student is registered with the University's disability support program
- Complaint Decisions and outcomes, and
- recommendations for continuous improvement to University process.

4.17 Maintenance and improvement

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services) is responsible for the maintenance and improvement of the University's Student Complaints management process. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services) will ensure that the Student Complaints management process is used to promote the University's continuous improvement and ensure that all Formal Complaints made by Students are taken seriously. Where it is in the control of the University, every reasonable effort will be made to resolve it to the Student's satisfaction.

4.18 Referral of Formal Complaints

4.18.1 Complaints referred through the Student General Misconduct Procedure

Where a complaint involves the conduct of another Student, the complainant may appeal the Decision of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services) or the Student General Misconduct Committee by lodging an Appeal to the Non-Academic Appeals Committee in accordance with Section 4.10 of the Student General Misconduct Procedure.

4.18.2 Other Complaint matters

If a Student is dissatisfied with the Decision of their Formal Complaint and all internal review avenues have been exhausted, the Student has the right to refer their Formal Complaint to an external agency. External agencies may include:

1. the Commonwealth Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (in relation to discrimination and sexual harassment); or
2. the Office of the Information Commissioner; or
3. the Student's State or Territory Ombudsman Office for Student's studying within Australia or the Commonwealth Ombudsman or the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office for Students studying internationally (in relation to the application of policies and

procedures and administrative processes).

5 References

Nil.

6 Schedules

This procedure must be read in conjunction with its subordinate schedules as provided in the table below.

7 Procedure Information

Subordinate Schedules	
Accountable Officer	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Services)
Responsible Officer	Director (Student and Academic Support)
Policy Type	University Procedure
Approved Date	10/4/2019
Effective Date	10/4/2019
Review Date	20/7/2018
Relevant Legislation	<i>Age Discrimination Act 2004</i> <i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1991</i> <i>Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986</i> <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> <i>Disability Services Act 2006 (Qld)</i> <i>Education Services for Overseas Student Act 2000</i> <i>Electronic Transactions Act 1999</i> <i>Equal Employment Opportunity (Commonwealth Authorities) Act 1987</i> <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> <i>Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010 (Qld)</i>

	<p><u>Public Sector Ethics Act 1994</u></p> <p><u>Racial Discrimination Act 1975</u></p> <p><u>Racial Hatred Act 1995</u></p> <p><u>Sex Discrimination Act 1984</u></p> <p><u>University of Southern Queensland Act 1998</u></p> <p><u>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)</u></p>
Related Policies	<p><u>Academic Integrity Policy</u></p> <p><u>Code of Conduct Policy</u></p> <p><u>Employee Complaints and Grievances Policy</u></p> <p><u>Employee Equity and Diversity Policy</u></p> <p><u>Fraud Corruption and Control Management Policy and Procedure</u></p> <p><u>Harassment and Discrimination Complaint Resolution for Students Policy and Procedure</u></p> <p><u>Policy on Complaints Involving Council Members</u></p> <p><u>Privacy Policy</u></p> <p><u>Public Interest Disclosure Policy and Procedure</u></p> <p><u>Records and Information Management Policy</u></p> <p><u>Research Code of Conduct Policy</u></p> <p><u>Right to Information Policy</u></p> <p><u>Student Code of Conduct Policy</u></p> <p><u>Student Complaint and Appeal Policy</u></p> <p><u>Student Expectations and Responsibilities Policy</u></p> <p><u>Students with a Disability Policy and Procedure</u></p> <p><u>Work Health and Safety Policy</u></p>
Related Procedures	<p><u>Academic Integrity Procedure</u></p>

	<p>Complaints Involving Council Members Procedure</p> <p>Disciplinary Action for Misconduct or Serious Misconduct Procedure</p> <p>Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Complaints against Employees Procedure</p> <p>Higher Degree by Research Thesis Examination Procedure</p> <p>Research Code of Conduct: Management of Potential Breaches Procedure</p> <p>Student Authority to Act Procedure</p> <p>Student General Misconduct Procedure</p>
<p>Related forms, publications and websites</p>	<p>Australian/New Zealand Standard- Guidelines for complaints management in organizations (AS/NZS 10002-2014)</p> <p>Feedback, Complaints and Appeals</p> <p>Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Practice Manual</p> <p>Student Complaint Type and Responsibilities Schedule</p>
<p>Definitions</p>	<p>Terms defined in the Definitions Dictionary</p> <p>Academic Appeal</p> <p>A formal, written request made by a Student to the Academic Appeals Committee to have a Decision, in relation to an academic matter, overturned.</p> <p>Accountable Officer</p> <p>The person or entity accountable for the Policy or Procedure including development, implementation, monitoring and review. The Accountable Officer may nominate a Responsible Officer to manage this on their behalf.</p> <p>Authorised Representative</p> <p>A representative who has been authorised to represent or act on behalf of a Student and acknowledged as such by the University in writing and in compliance with relevant University policy.</p> <p>Authority to Act</p> <p>An Authority to Act is an official permission given by a person to</p>

another person and/or entity to act on certain matters, or granted to a person or entity to act on behalf of another person through an existing legal instrument for a certain period of time. An Authority to Act can be given in relation to all business transactions with the University, or extended in relation to certain matters only.

[Complaint](#)

A Complaint is an “expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the University, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required”.

[Decision](#)

A determination made by an Employee, contractor or other authorised delegate in the course of their duties on behalf of the University.

[Employee](#)

A person employed by the University and whose conditions of employment are covered by the USQ Enterprise Agreement and includes persons employed on a continuing, fixed term or casual basis. Employees also include senior Employees whose conditions of employment are covered by a written agreement or contract with the University.

[Exclusion](#)

Prohibition from enrolling in a Course or a program for a specified period.

[Formal Complaint](#)

A Formal Complaint is a written Complaint lodged with the relevant delegate, which is dealt with through a formal process of the University. It may lead to a formal investigation of allegations.

[Informal Complaint](#)

A Complaint expressed either verbally or in writing to a relevant delegate, which is not dealt with through a formal process of the University. It may involve a discussion with relevant parties in order to receive information and explore options on resolving the matter. It does not involve a formal investigation or the determination of evidence.

[Investigating Officer](#)

Any person appointed by an Accountable Officer to undertake a preliminary investigation, including any Employee or external person believed to be competent in performing such an investigation.

[Mediation](#)

A process in which parties to a dispute, with the assistance of a neutral third party ('the Mediator'), identify the disputed issues, develop options, consider alternatives and endeavour to reach an agreement. The Mediator has no advisory or other determinative role with regard to the content of the dispute or the outcome of its resolution, but may advise on or determine the process of mediation whereby resolution is attempted.

[Non-Academic Appeal](#)

A formal, written request made by a Student to a higher authority to have a Decision, in relation to a non-academic matter, overturned.

[Notice](#)

A Notice from the University is a document, whether physical or electronic. A Notice may be: given by hand to the addressee or delivered to the address provided by the addressee to the University; or sent by registered or pre-paid mail to the address provided by the addressee to the University; or sent by electronic communication to the University-issued email account provided by the University to a Student during the period of Enrolment until the completion of their program; or sent by electronic communication to the email address provided to the University by an addressee not enrolled at the University. A Notice is taken to be received if: given by hand to the addressee or delivered to the address provided to the University by the addressee; or sent by registered or pre-paid mail - three University Business Days after the date of posting; or sent by electronic communication - at the time that would be the time of receipt under the Electronic Transactions Act 1999 or its succeeding legislation. A Notice that would be deemed to have been received out of business hours or on a non-University Business Day will instead be deemed received on the next University Business Day.

[Student](#)

A person who: has been Admitted or Enrolled in an Academic Program at the University, but has not yet graduated from the program; or has been Enrolled in a Course at the University but has not yet completed the Course.

[University](#)

	<p>The term 'University' or 'USQ' means the University of Southern Queensland.</p> <p>University Business Days</p> <p>The days of Monday to Friday inclusive between 9am and 5pm Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST), with the exclusion of gazetted Public Holidays for the relevant campus location, plus the closure of the University between 25 December and 1 January in the following year inclusive as specified in the USQ Enterprise Agreement, as well as any closure of the University either at one or several campuses in accordance with a direction of the Crisis Management Team.</p>
	<p>Definitions that relate to this procedure only</p>
<p>Keywords</p>	<p>Complaints</p>
<p>Record No</p>	<p>14/1630PL</p>