

## Student Complaints Procedure 2016-2017

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### 1. Introduction

This procedure provides a mechanism for addressing concerns raised by students promptly, fairly and effectively in order to help the Royal Agricultural University achieve the highest quality in its student experience.

### 2. Guiding Principles

- 2.1. The University seeks to minimise student complaints by ensuring that students have opportunities to participate in formal decision-making processes at all levels and by encouraging regular feedback through the student rep system.
- 2.2. In the event that you are dissatisfied with a University Service, the University seeks to:
  - a) Resolve the matter at the earliest opportunity
  - b) Investigate thoroughly and fairly
  - c) Ensure the process is unbiased
- 2.3. It is the intention of the procedure that complaints are resolved as quickly and at as early a stage as is possible
- 2.4. In order to achieve this, the University asks that you will have observed your own obligations and raised the problem as soon as it arose
- 2.5. Details of your complaints will remain confidential to the parties concerned
- 2.6. In the interest of natural justice, you, and anyone else involved, will be entitled to see all evidence to be considered and to put their case
- 2.7. If there is to be a panel hearing, everyone involved will have the right of attendance and to be heard
- 2.8. Anonymous complaints or evidence will not be considered
- 2.9. If there are allegations of a criminal offence, the University may refer the matter to the police and suspend its own proceedings until the outcome of any criminal proceedings are known
- 2.10. You will not be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint. However, if it is later discovered that a complaint was not genuine; the University may consider initiating the disciplinary procedure

### 3. Who may use this procedure and in what circumstances?

- 3.1. You may only use this procedure if you are a currently registered student at the Royal Agricultural University or, in the case of taught students, if you are within one month of ceasing your registration. If you are a postgraduate research student, you may use the procedure until one month after you have been notified of your final award or notice of withdrawal.

3.2. The procedure is available for you to raise concerns about your university experience (e.g. teaching, supervision or support services)

3.3. This procedure does not cover academic appeals which are dealt with under the Appeals Procedure, contained in the General Rules for Academic Assessment.

3.4. This procedure does not deal with allegations of bullying or harassment which are dealt with by the Bullying & Harassment Policy.

3.5. The procedure is for use of individual students only. Where several students share a concern and wish to raise the matter as a group, they should do so through the student rep system. Where this fails to resolve the problem, individual students may raise the matter formally under this procedure and move immediately to the formal process (stage 2).

## **4. Before you complain**

4.1. Before initiating a complaint, you may wish to take advice. Amongst those who may be able to help are the following

- Student Union Officers
- Student Support Services Manager
- Your personal tutor
- If you are a PGR student: your supervisor
- Disability Officer

## **5. How to complain**

5.1. There are three stages to the Complaints Procedure. In summary, they are:

### **Stage 1. The Informal Stage**

At this stage, you should raise the issue with the person directly responsible. If you feel unable to do this, members of the Student's Union or the Student Support Services Manager, with your consent, will help you. You may not raise a formal complaint unless you can demonstrate that you have first raised the matter informally.

### **Stage 2. The First Formal Stage**

At this stage you should ensure your complaint is put in writing and addressed to the Academic Registrar (or nominated representative). You should ensure that you explain with whom you raised the matter informally, the outcome and why you remain dissatisfied.

### **Stage 3. The Second (and final) Formal Stage**

At this stage you should refer your complaint to the Vice Chancellor. This may only be done if the first two stages have been completed and you still remain dissatisfied with the outcome. You are invited, when making your complaint, to indicate what resolution you are seeking, without prejudice to any final remedy. You are reminded an informal resolution to your complaint is possible at any stage.

## **6. The Procedure**

### **6.1. Stage 1 – The Informal Stage**

This stage is intended to be a largely oral process. It is expected you will make every reasonable attempt to raise the complaint with the responsible individual as soon as possible after the event which is the subject of the complaint and that this individual will make every effort to resolve the complaint at this level. This person will be able to supply you with written confirmation that you raised a complaint informally should the matter not be resolved and you wish to proceed to stage 2. This maybe in the form of an email. It is recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances in which you may consider you cannot approach the individual concerned. In such cases, you may seek help from someone else such as your personal tutor or Student Support Services Manager to ask for assistance. You may also approach the Students Union.

## **6.2. Stage 2: The First Formal Stage**

6.2.1. In order for the complaint to be considered formally, you must put the complaint in writing and send it to the Academic Registrar. Your details, the details of the complaint, the remedy sought and any supporting evidence should be included. You should also explain how the matter has been raised informally and why you remain dissatisfied. You should attach an email or other written confirmation that the matter has been raised informally to the form.

6.2.2. No complaint will be accepted formally unless the informal stage has been completed.

6.2.3. You should expect to receive an acknowledgement of receipt from the Academic Registrar or their nominee within five working days.

6.2.4. The Academic Registrar or their nominee will identify an appropriate person to investigate the complaint, known as the Investigating Officer. This should normally be a senior person in the school or department in which the matter arose. However, the complaint must not be investigated by any person who is the subject of, or who has a direct personal interest in the outcome of, the complaint. Where necessary and in order to avoid such conflict, the matter will be investigated by an appropriate person in another school or department.

6.2.5. The Investigating Officer will gather the evidence necessary to evaluate the merit of the complaint, interviewing you and those complained about as necessary.

6.2.6. The Investigating Officer will within 20 working days of their receipt of the complaint, provide to the Academic Registrar a written report of their findings and recommendations for any action to be taken in response to the complaint. If the Investigating Officer cannot meet the 20-day target, they must provide an interim report to you and the Academic Registrar setting out the reasons for this delay and the expected date by which the final report will be available to the Academic Registrar

6.2.7. The Academic Registrar will review the final report to ensure that the procedure has been followed, that there has been an objective consideration of the evidence and that the reasons for the conclusion and recommendations are clear.

6.2.8. The Academic Registrar will provide a written response to you within 5 working days of receipt of the report. If this deadline cannot be achieved the reasons for the unavoidable delay will be communicated to you together with an expected date for the delivery of the written response.

6.2.9. If the Academic Registrar is not satisfied the matter has been investigated fully and fairly and in accordance with the procedure, a further investigation will be undertaken.

6.2.10. The Academic Registrar will keep a record of all complaints made under formal or informal procedure, their outcome, and a profile of complainants, to allow trends to be identified and acted upon.

### **6.3 Stage 3: The Second (and final) Formal Stage**

6.3.1. If your complaint is not resolve under Stage 2, you may, within one month of the date you received the response to your complaint, request a review. However you will need to demonstrate that

- The original complaint was not fully and fairly investigated, or
- Reasons were not given for the outcome of the complaint, or
- The complaints procedure was not followed, or
- Fresh evidence, that was not available during the original investigation, has become available

6.3.2. No new grounds for complaint may be raised at Stage 3 but you may submit further evidence in support of your original case

6.3.3. Your request for review must be made in writing to the Vice Chancellor who will consider if there are grounds for review

6.3.4. If the Vice Chancellor is satisfied that you have demonstrated there are grounds for review, a Complaints Panel will be convened to consider the original complaint and its investigation.

6.3.5. The Complaints Panel will comprise members nominated by the Vice Chancellor and include:

- Head of School or department
- Another senior member of staff
- A Student, identified by the Vice Chancellor in consultation with the Chair of the Student's Union,

No member of staff involved in the panel may have been associated with the complaint, investigation or outcome

6.3.6. The Vice Chancellor will appoint one of the members to chair the panel and nominate an additional member of staff to clerk the panel.

6.3.7. The documentation for the panel meeting outlining the original complaint, the investigation of the complaint, the original outcome and the request and reasons for the review will be copied to you no less than seven working days before the panel is due to meet.

6.3.8. You will be invited to provide written comments on the papers, identifying any omissions or inaccuracies. A reasonable deadline for the receipt of your comments will be set.

6.3.9. You will be asked to confirm whether you wish to attend for an interview with the panel and if so whether you will be accompanied. You may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or other supporter who would usually be a member of the University or the Student Union.

6.3.10. All papers together with your comments, will be circulated to the Panel at least two working days before the Panel is due to convene

### **7. Complaints Panel Protocol**

7.1. The panel will convene initially only in the presence of the clerk to ensure the necessary documentation is in place and identify any particular aspects of the complaint or its investigation that the panel wishes to explore.

7.2. The panel will invite you to outline your initial complaint, any efforts you had made to resolve the matter and reasons why you have requested a review of the complaint investigation and outcome. The panel members may ask you questions to clarify any issues. The panel may then ask you to leave the meeting while it invites others to attend before the panel and to respond to the issues you have raised. You may be asked by the panel to return to meet with the panel to address or clarify any further matters raised.

7.3. The panel will then retire to consider its decision. The Panel will inform you and the subject of your complaint or the person responsible for the matter about which you complained will be informed in writing within 10 working days of the Panel's decision. The Panel will set out whether your complaint should be upheld, any remedy or redress and its views on the conduct of the original investigation of your complaint. The letter will confirm that the complaints procedure had been completed and that if you remain dissatisfied with the response you should refer the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education if it is eligible under its procedures. This must be done within three months of the date on which the written outcome of the panel letter was issued. Information on this process can be found at <http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/how-to-make-a-complaint.aspx>

7.4. If you are unable to attend the panel meeting or comply with the timescales this will not invalidate the proceedings and the meeting may be held in your absence.

## 8. Timescales

8.1. The University will not normally consider a complaint initially (stage 1) which is raised more than one calendar month after the incident giving rise to the complaint unless there are good reasons for the delay

8.2. In the event that you feel there are good reasons for the delay, you should let the Academic Registrar know of those reasons and should support this with independent evidence in writing from a relevant professional (e.g. doctor)

8.3. The University aims to resolve matters as quickly as possible. The University aims to give decisions within the following timescales:

- a) **Stage 1:** within 10 working days of the matter being raised with the person responsible
- b) **Stage 2:** within 30 working days of the Academic Registrar receiving a formal complaint when the matter has been previously raised informally
- c) **Stage 3:** within 60 working days of receipt of the complaint at stage 3

If the matter requires further investigation and the timescales cannot be achieved, you will be informed of the delay in writing and the reason for it.

## 9. Monitoring

9.1. The University will keep a record of all complaints made and their outcome. This will enable it to monitor matters that are a cause for concern and take steps to address such concerns. It will also help the University ensure that complaints are dealt with properly and consistently.

## Contact us

For any queries concerning this policy please contact the Academic Registrar