

# Student Complaints Policy

## Introduction

1. Queen Mary University of London defines a complaint as the expression of a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of a student's learning opportunities or student experience. This policy applies to all current students, up to and including a period of three-months following the end of a student's period of registration.
2. The Student Complaints Policy is overseen at the highest level of Queen Mary. The Principal and President has overall authority in the application of the policy; the Principal and President's authority is delegated as detailed below.
3. The emphasis of this Policy is on handling complaints in a timely and effective manner. Queen Mary seeks to resolve complaints at an early stage where possible; many problems can be solved informally, without the need for a formal complaint. Students will always be encouraged to attempt an informal resolution in the first instance. Where informal resolution is not possible, there are two stages, Formal Complaint and Complaint Review, which represent a formal complaint under this Policy.
4. Queen Mary undertakes that any student who wishes to pursue a complaint under this Policy will not suffer detriment in their subsequent studies as a result of action taken. However, Queen Mary may consider taking disciplinary action under the [Code of Student Discipline](#) if a complaint is brought in bad faith, or is considered to be vexatious.
5. The Student Complaints Policy covers all concerns or complaints about both academic and non-academic services provided by Queen Mary. In the event that a formal concern about the conduct of another student is the subject of the complaint (for example bullying, harassment or discrimination) then the matter will be investigated under the [Code of Student Discipline](#). Although the matter will be investigated under the Code of Student Discipline, students making complaints of this kind will receive a Formal Complaint outcome, as described in paragraph 26, which will include information on how to submit a Complaint Review should they remain dissatisfied with that outcome.
6. Complaints about financial services offered by Queen Mary are eligible for consideration under the [Financial Ombudsman Service](#) (FOS) scheme once students have completed both formal stages of the complaints procedure.
7. There is a separate appeals process for requests to review decisions made about student progression, assessment, and award. Appeals are considered under the Queen Mary [Appeal Policy](#). The policy and information on submitting an appeal are available [online](#).
8. Research students who wish to submit a complaint should follow the stages outlined in this policy; however, there is some further guidance for research students under the section headed '[Research Student Complaints](#)'.
9. All complaints will be recorded in the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office, including a note of the substance of the complaint and how the matter was resolved.
10. Complaint outcomes can lead to improvements in the services that Queen Mary delivers, and provide helpful feedback for enhancing the quality of learning opportunities or the student experience. Queen Mary is committed to resolving complaints in a way that ensures the institution is adhering at all times to its stated core values. A report on the number of complaints received and the outcomes will be considered by both the Senate and the Council on an annual basis.
11. Queen Mary will seek to maintain confidentiality during a complaint investigation; however, if a student names another member of Queen Mary in their complaint the person(s) named will normally be informed of the nature of the complaint in order for them to provide a response. If a student is

unable to disclose the name of an individual who is key to their complaint then it will not be possible to investigate the complaint.

12. If the outcome of a complaint leads to action under a separate procedure of Queen Mary, including staff policies operated by Human Resources, the complainant will receive a full response to the concern that they have raised, as described in paragraph 26. The outcome following any subsequent procedure (e.g. the [Code of Student Discipline](#)) will remain confidential though the investigation report may be used as evidence in any further proceedings.

## Complaint stages

13. Complaints must normally be made within three months of the incident being complained about. A complaint made after three months will not normally be accepted. If a complaint is made after the end of a student's period of registration at Queen Mary this must be done within three months of the last date of enrolment, or it will not normally be accepted.

14. The Queen Mary student complaints process is made up of the following stages:

- ♦ **Informal resolution:** Queen Mary supports and encourages an informal approach to complaint resolution where appropriate. The following section of this policy contains useful information for students that will assist them when attempting an informal resolution.
- ♦ **Formal Complaint:** a formal complaint to the Head of School/Institute or Head of Professional Service Department/or equivalent.
- ♦ **Complaint Review:** a request for a review of the complaint by the President and Principal's nominee. A Complaint Review represents the end of Queen Mary's internal procedures. If a complainant is still not satisfied after a Complaint Review they can make a submission to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.
- ♦ **Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA):** The OIA is the independent body that reviews student complaints for all higher education institutions in England and Wales, and is free to students. The OIA is not a further stage of Queen Mary's procedures and is not an appeal body.

## Informal resolution and sources of help and advice

15. A student should seek to resolve a concern informally as soon as possible. Queen Mary is committed to resolving problems informally wherever possible and encourages students to engage in this approach as many issues can be resolved without recourse to a formal complaint. Complaints resolved in this way avoid a protracted investigation and are to the benefit of all parties.
16. Queen Mary has a number of sources of help and advice available to students which may be of benefit before and during the complaints process:
  - ♦ The complainant's school or institute.
  - ♦ The [Students' Union](#), particularly the Advocacy and Representation Manager.
  - ♦ The [Advice and Counselling Service](#).
  - ♦ The [Report + Support](#) portal.
17. Matters relating to a programme of study are often best dealt with by approaching the relevant member of academic staff; this may be an Academic Advisor or a designated member of staff identified by the school/institute. The member of staff will seek to resolve the matter through informal discussion. Students may also raise concerns with a student representative or through the Student-Staff Liaison Committee.
18. Students can raise concerns at the Student-Staff Liaison Committee meetings, particularly if the problem affects a number of students.
19. If a concern is about a Queen Mary service or venue, for example, halls of residence, a student should first raise the matter with the relevant member of staff from that service area.

20. Mediation is a useful way of resolving some matters, and Queen Mary encourages students to use mediation where it may help resolve concerns. Please see [Appendix 2](#) for more information about mediation.
21. If it is not possible to resolve a concern informally then a student may submit a Formal Complaint in accordance with this Policy. If the student does not wish to submit a Formal Complaint then this is the end of the matter as far as this Policy is concerned and a complaint will not be recorded.

## Formal Complaint & Complaint Review

### Formal Complaint at school/institute/professional service level

22. If a concern cannot be resolved via informal means, or if the matter is relatively serious, then a Formal Complaint should be submitted.
23. To submit a Formal Complaint a complainant must complete the [Formal Complaint form](#) and send it to the Head of School/Director of Institute (or their nominee), or to the Head of the relevant professional service (or equivalent). Students are advised that they can use the [Report + Support](#) portal to raise issues and to access support during the complaints process; the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office will advise students on next steps when issues are raised in this way.
24. The Head of School/Institute (or their nominee), or the Head of the relevant professional service (or equivalent), will investigate the complaint, or appoint an investigating officer to investigate on their behalf. The investigator may meet with a complainant to discuss the complaint; they will also contact others involved in the complaint as appropriate.
25. If a problem is particularly severe and/or urgent, or if there is good reason why a Formal Complaint cannot be considered at the school/institute/professional service level, it will be considered by the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office, subject to the approval of the head of that Office; approval may be sought by either the complainant or the relevant school/institute/professional service. In such cases, the complaint will be investigated by a caseworker from the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office, with a report to be submitted to the Academic Registrar's nominee for a decision. The same investigative steps noted immediately above will apply. A caseworker who investigates a complaint under this provision will be precluded from further involvement with a case should it proceed to a Complaint Review.
26. A complainant will receive a written outcome to a Formal Complaint, normally within 42 calendar days (30 working days, 6 weeks). The letter will inform the complainant of the outcome in response to their Formal Complaint including what action, if any, is to be taken to address the matter.
27. Please note that while Queen Mary makes every effort to conclude complaints as quickly as possible, it may not always be possible to provide an outcome for a Formal Complaint within 42 calendar days. Some complaints may take longer than 42 calendar days to conclude at this stage; if it is not possible to complete a Formal Complaint within 42 calendar days the complainant will be written to at the earliest opportunity, and within the 42 calendar day period, with an explanation as to the status of their Formal Complaint and when it is likely to be concluded.

### Complaint Review at institutional level

28. If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their Formal Complaint they may submit a request for a Complaint Review to the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office.
29. A request for a Complaint Review must be submitted within 14 calendar days of the notification of a Formal Complaint outcome. Requests submitted after this time will only be considered at the discretion of the head of the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office where the complainant is able to demonstrate good reason for the delay.

30. To submit a request for a Complaint Review the complainant must complete the [Complaint Review form](#) and submit it to the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office by email, to [appeals@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:appeals@qmul.ac.uk). They will also need to submit their Formal Complaint form and outcome letter.
31. Whereas at the Formal Complaint stage a full investigation of the matter is undertaken, the Complaint Review stage will only be concerned with two issues:
  - ♦ was the complaint considered in accordance with this Policy?
  - ♦ was the final decision reasonable and in accordance with the facts of the case?
32. A Complaint Review will be considered by a caseworker from the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office and a Queen Mary Complaints Assessor, who is a senior member of Queen Mary staff. The caseworker will summarise the investigation and outcome of the Formal Complaint, but may obtain written reports from relevant people should further information be required.
33. The complainant will be sent a summary report of their Complaint Review so that they have an opportunity to comment upon the facts of the case, particularly any points that they feel do not fairly reflect the circumstances. In order to ensure a timely response to a Complaint Review, a complainant must provide any comments within 7 calendar days, except by exceptional agreement.
34. Once a complainant's comments on the summary report of their Complaint Review have been received, the caseworker will submit the case, together with a recommendation on a proposed course of action, to a Queen Mary Complaints Assessor for consideration.
35. The Complaints Assessor will consider all the facts of the case and confirm whether the recommended course of action is fair and equitable, in accordance with the grounds above (at paragraph 31).
36. The complainant will receive a formal written outcome to their request for a Complaint Review, normally within one month. Action will only be taken only if one or both of the grounds above (at paragraph 31) is met. The outcome letter will inform the complainant of the outcome of their Complaint Review and of any subsequent action Queen Mary is taking following the request. This will be a Completion of Procedures letter and represents the end of Queen Mary's internal student complaints process.
37. Please note that while Queen Mary makes every effort to conclude complaints as quickly as possible, it may not always be possible to provide an outcome for a Complaint Review within one month. If it is not possible to complete a Complaint Review within one month the complainant will be written to, within the one-month period, with an explanation as to the status of their Complaint Review and when it is likely to be concluded. Queen Mary endeavours to ensure that no complaint will take longer than 90 calendar days to reach the end of the student complaints process, from the day the Formal Complaint was first submitted.

## Submission to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator

38. If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome provided by Queen Mary following the outcome of a Complaint Review they may submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).
39. Information about submitting a complaint to the OIA is contained in the completion of procedures letter issued by Queen Mary following the outcome of a Complaint Review. A complainant can also find information about how to submit a complaint to the OIA on their website: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).
40. The OIA will consider whether Queen Mary followed its procedure correctly and whether the outcome is reasonable in the light of the facts of the case. Please note that the OIA will not normally consider a submission until a complainant has completed both stages of Queen Mary's internal procedures.

## Research student complaints

41. Research students who wish to submit a complaint should follow the process outlined in this policy.
42. If a research student has a problem regarding their supervision they should address their concern to their supervisor in the first instance and keep a clear record of this. Please refer to the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#), which provides the framework of procedures and practices to support research students and their supervisors.
43. If a situation is not resolved or concerns remain regarding supervision then students are expected to raise their concerns with their School/Institute's Director of Graduate Studies (or equivalent) as a Formal Complaint. A Complaint Review regarding a student's supervision will not normally be considered unless the student has first discussed the matter with the Director of Graduate Studies (or equivalent).
44. A student who makes a complaint regarding supervision will be treated in a non-detrimental manner, meaning their study at Queen Mary will not be jeopardised by them raising a concern in good faith.
45. Research students are reminded of the importance of raising concerns at the earliest possible opportunity. A student who only raises a concern regarding supervision after they have failed to progress or have failed to be awarded the research degree means that it is hard to rectify the problem.

This version of the Student Complaints Policy was approved by Senate on 10 June 2021

## Appendix 1: Principles

46. This Policy seeks to embody the following principles:

- ◆ Students have the opportunity to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage. Anonymous complaints are not usually required or accepted; however, if a complainant feels that there are exceptional circumstances relating to their case they should submit a request for anonymity together with supporting evidence. It is important to note that raising a concern anonymously could impede the investigation of a complaint and the communication of the outcome.
- ◆ Positive engagement and the opportunity for early resolution.
- ◆ Complaints are handled in a timely, fair, and reasonable manner.
- ◆ Natural justice – no person who has any direct interest in a complaint will be involved in deciding the outcome and a complainant will be guaranteed a fair consideration.
- ◆ Confidentiality – a complaint will be dealt with confidentially, and only the person(s) responsible for dealing with the complaint, and those parties to it, will be informed.
- ◆ Representation – a complainant has the right to be represented when they make a complaint, or at any subsequent meeting to deal with the complaint.
- ◆ Group complaints – a number of students may bring a group complaint about the same concern if they have all been affected by the issue. Students wishing to bring a group complaint should nominate one person as the representative for the complaint who will act as the main point of contact during the process.

## Appendix 2: Mediation

47. Mediation can be a helpful tool in resolving complaints at an early stage.

48. Mediation is a confidential and non-prejudicial process. It involves discussion between the parties and the mediator. Only the fact that mediation took place and the outcome, successful or otherwise, will be recorded.

49. Mediation allows both parties to abide by the terms agreed and recourse to formal procedures will not be permitted.

50. If an agreement is not reached, this will not inhibit the capacity of either party to take up or resume formal procedures. Information that is disclosed within the mediation process cannot be directly used in any subsequent formal procedures.

## Complaint flow diagram

