



Senate

Paper title	Student Complaints Policy
Outcome requested	The Senate is asked to approve the revised Policy.
Points to note and further information	<p>The Appeal Policy and Academic Misconduct Policy were amended in 2019 to bring them into the new Queen Mary house style (typeface and layout); a small number of amendments to improve the policies were introduced at the same time. The same review process has been applied to the remaining casework policies in 2020, including the Student Complaints Policy. The changes are primarily cosmetic rather than substantive.</p> <p>Specific changes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Renamed the Stage 3 process from ‘appeal’ to ‘final review’ to distinguish it from the wholly separate appeals process. 2. Expanded those who can consider a Stage 3 complaint from the Vice-President (Education) (or, where they cannot act, another Vice-Principal) to any member of senior staff nominated by the Principal and President. This will help in reducing delays in the process, which is currently reliant on a very small number of staff with considerable other commitments. 3. Explained that the Stage 2 Complaints Assessor is appointed on the authority of the Vice-Principal (Education). 4. Updated terminology, including changes to the titles of certain roles (eg personal tutor > advisor). 5. Adopted the revised Queen Mary visual style. 6. Added internal and external links where appropriate. 7. Removed gendered language (his/her > their, etc). 8. Changed ‘QMUL’ to ‘Queen Mary’ throughout. 9. The Complaints Policy previously included the document ‘Procedures for dealing with complaints about the Student’s Union’ as an appendix. That has been detached and will be published separately. No changes have been made to that document other than purely cosmetic amendments. <p>The full Policy is appended, with the amendments shown in track changes and explained with comments.</p>
Questions to consider	Is the Senate satisfied that the first three changes are appropriate?

Regulatory/statutory reference points	OfS conditions of registration , notably sections B, E, and F. OIA Good Practice Framework: Handling complaints and academic appeals QAA: UK Quality Code for Higher Education > Advice and Guidance > Concerns, complaints and appeals
Strategy and risk	
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	Considered and endorsed by the EQSB (13 May 2020) Senate to approve.
Author	Simon Hayter, Assistant Academic Registrar (Assessment Governance) Jane Pallant, Deputy Academic Registrar

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. Where informal resolution is not possible, there are three stages which represent a formal complaint under this policy.
4. Queen Mary undertakes that any student who wishes to pursue a complaint under this procedure will not suffer detriment in their subsequent studies as a result of action taken under this policy. 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 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 your complaint (for example bullying, harassment and discrimination) then the matter will be investigated under the Code of Student Discipline.
6. Complaints about financial services offered by Queen Mary are eligible for consideration under the [Financial Ombudsman Service](#) (FOS) scheme once students have completed stages 1 to 3 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. 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 then 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.

Commented [SH1]: 'or student experience' added, as not all issues relate directly to learning opportunities (eg complaints about facilities).

Commented [SH2]: 'or the student experience' added, as explained in paragraph 1.

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. The outcome following any subsequent procedure (eg 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. A student must submit a complaint within three months of the end of their period of registration at Queen Mary, or it will not normally be accepted.
14. The Complaints Policy has the following stages:
- ♦ **Informal resolution:** Queen Mary supports and encourages an informal approach to complaint resolution where appropriate.
 - ♦ **Stage 1:** a formal complaint to the Head of School/Institute or Head of Professional Service Department/or equivalent.
 - ♦ **Stage 2:** a formal complaint at institutional level.
 - ♦ **Stage 3:** appeal to the President and Principal's nominee. Stage 3 represents the end of Queen Mary's internal procedures. If a complainant is still not satisfied after Stage 3 then 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:
- ♦ Your school or institute.
 - ♦ The [Students' Union](#), particularly the Advocacy and Representation Manager.
 - ♦ The [Advice and Counselling Service](#).
17. Matters relating to a programmes of study are often best dealt with by approaching the relevant member of academic staff; this may be your **advisor** or the 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 your concern is about a Queen Mary service or venue, for example your halls of residence, you should first raise the matter with the relevant member of staff from that service area.
20. If the most appropriate contact is closely related to the complaint, for example an advisor or head of professional service, then it may be appropriate to proceed directly to [Stage 2](#) of this policy.

Commented [SH3]: Amended from Personal Tutor to reflect current terminology.

21. 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.
22. If it is not possible to resolve a concern informally then a student may submit a formal complaint under [Stage 1](#) of 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 formal complaint will not be recorded.

Formal complaint

Stage 1: Formal complaint at school/institute/professional service level

23. If a concern cannot be resolved via informal means, or if the matter is relatively serious, then a formal Stage 1 complaint should be made.
24. To submit a complaint at Stage 1 you will need to complete the [Stage 1 complaint form](#) and send this to the Head of School/Institute (or their nominee), or to the Head of the relevant professional service (or equivalent).
25. The Head of School/Institute (or their nominee), or the Head of the relevant professional service (or equivalent), will investigate your complaint, or appoint an investigating officer to investigate the complaint. The investigator may meet with you to discuss your complaint; they will also contact others involved in the complaint as appropriate.
26. You will receive a formal written outcome to your complaint, normally within 15 working days. The outcome letter will inform you of the outcome in response to your complaint including what action, if any, is to be taken to address your complaint.
27. If it is not possible to complete your complaint within 15 working days then you will be written to with an explanation as to the status of your complaint and when it is likely to be concluded.
28. 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 Stage 1 complaint within 15 working days. Some complaints may take longer than 15 working days to conclude at Stage 1; however, Queen Mary endeavours to ensure that no complaint will take longer than three months to resolve.

Stage 2: Formal complaint at institutional level

29. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your Stage 1 complaint then you may submit Stage 2, which is a formal complaint at institutional level.
30. A Stage 2 complaint must be submitted within two weeks of the formal notification of a Stage 1 outcome. Complaints submitted after this time will only be considered at the discretion of the Academic Registrar (or their nominee) where the complainant is able to demonstrate good reason for the delay.
31. Complaints will not normally be considered at Stage 2 unless they have first been considered at Stage 1, unless the problem is particularly severe and/or urgent, or there is a good reason why the complaint cannot be considered at Stage 1.
32. To submit a Stage 2 complaint you should complete the [complaint form](#) and submit this to the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office in the Academic Secretariat, or by email to appeals@qmul.ac.uk. You will also need to submit your Stage 1 complaint form and outcome letter.

33. A Stage 2 complaint will be investigated by the Academic Registrar's nominee; this will normally be a caseworker from the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office. The caseworker will investigate the substance of your complaint, and may obtain written reports from relevant people about the substance of your complaint.
34. You will be sent a summary report of your complaint so that you have an opportunity to comment upon the facts of your case, particularly any points that you feel do not fairly reflect the circumstances. In order to ensure a timely response to a complaint, a student is asked to provide any comments within seven calendar days.
35. Once the investigation into your complaint is complete the caseworker will submit your case, together with a recommendation on a proposed course of action, to the Queen Mary Complaints Assessor for consideration.
36. The Queen Mary Complaints Assessor is a senior member of academic staff, appointed on the authority of the Vice-Principal (Education).
37. The Complaints Assessor will consider all the facts of the case and confirm whether the recommended outcome is fair and equitable.
38. You will receive a formal written outcome to your Stage 2 complaint, normally within one month. The outcome letter will inform you if your complaint is upheld or not upheld and of any subsequent action Queen Mary is taking following your complaint.
39. If it is not possible to complete your complaint within one month then you will be written to with an explanation as to the status of your complaint and when it is likely to be concluded.
40. 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 Stage 2 complaint within one month. Some complaints may take longer to resolve at Stage 2 for a variety of reasons; Queen Mary endeavours to ensure that no complaint will take longer than two months to resolve.

Stage 3: Appeal to the President and Principal's nominee Final review

41. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your Stage 2 complaint, you may submit a Stage 3 appeal final review request in writing to the President and Principal's nominee. A Stage 3 complaint will normally be considered by the Vice-Principal (Education) unless a senior member of staff nominated by the President and Principal who has not previously been involved in the case; in this event, the matter will be dealt with by another Vice-Principal.
42. A Stage 3 complaint must be submitted within one month of the formal notification of a Stage 2 outcome. Complaints submitted after this time will only be considered at the discretion of the President and Principal's nominee where the complainant is able to demonstrate good reason for the delay.
43. Whereas in the preceding stages of the Policy a full investigation of the matter is undertaken, the President and Principal's nominee Vice-Principal 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?
44. Therefore, the President and Principal's nominee Vice-Principal will only take action if one of the grounds above is met. The President and Principal's nominee Vice-Principal will provide a decision in writing via the Academic Secretariat, normally within month. This will be a Completion of Procedures letter and represents the end of Queen Mary's internal procedures.

Commented [SH4]: 'Appeal' amended to 'final review' throughout this section to distinguish it from the wholly separate appeal process.

Commented [SH5]: Expanded from VP Education (or another VP in their absence) to any nominated member of senior staff, to increase flexibility and expedite processes for students while retaining fairness and objectivity.

Submission to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator

45. If you are not satisfied with the outcome provided by Queen Mary following the decision of the [President and Principal's nominee VicePrincipal](#) at Stage 3 you may submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator [for Higher Education](#) (OIA).
46. Information about submitting a complaint to the OIA is contained in the completion of procedures letter that you are issued with by Queen Mary following the outcome of a Stage 3 complaint. You can also find information about how to submit a complaint to the OIA on their website: www.oiahe.org.uk.
47. 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 student has completed all Stages of Queen Mary's internal procedures.

Research students

48. Research student who wish to submit a complaint should follow the Stages as outlined in this policy.
49. 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.
50. 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 Research as a Stage 1 complaint. A Stage 2 complaint regarding a student's supervision will not normally be considered unless the student has first discussed the matter with the Director of Research.
51. 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.
52. 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 o progress or have failed to be awarded the [PhD-research degree](#) means that it is hard to rectify the problem.

Commented [SH6]: Amended from 'PhD' to 'research degree'. The PhD is not the only research degree available at Queen Mary.

Appendix 1: Principles

53. 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 you feel that there are exceptional circumstances relating to your case you 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 your 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 you will be guaranteed a fair consideration.
 - Confidentiality – your 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 – you have the right to be represented when you 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

54. Mediation can be a helpful tool in resolving complaints at an early stage.
55. Mediation is a confidential and non-prejudicial. 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.
56. Mediation allows both parties to abide by the terms agreed and recourse to formal procedures will not be permitted.
57. 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

