

Student Grievance Resolution Guideline

Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

(1) This Guideline supplements [Student Grievance Resolution Policy](#) and [Student Grievance Resolution Procedure](#) and provides practical advice to those involved in the University's student grievance or appeals processes.

Section 2 - Key Requirements

Grievance Guidelines for Students

Stating the Issue

(2) When preparing a formal written complaint the student should clearly state the issue or situation that has caused them concern and identify how they would like this to be resolved. They should also indicate what they have done to attempt to resolve the issue informally.

(3) Care should be taken to state the issue clearly and concisely, including referencing any legislation or policy as appropriate, without using offensive or inflammatory terms.

(4) Examples:

- a. A student may be dissatisfied with the quality of instruction they have received in a course and seek to have this concern investigated. The student should list the course and identify what it is that has caused them to complain, providing all relevant details.
- b. A student may be unhappy about the amount of internet quota that is assigned to them in their program of study, in which case they should set out what issues have arisen, and why they feel a greater quota is required.

Level of Detail

(5) The written complaint should be as specific as possible about the circumstances relating to the grievance and provide relevant evidence.

(6) Examples:

- a. If a student believes unreasonable expectations were placed on their assessment requirements, for example too much assessment work was required for the allocation of a trivial number of marks, the student must give details about the course and assessment items that concerned them.
- b. If a student believes they have been discriminated against because of their race, they must give specific examples of how they believe they have been treated differently from other students and any disadvantage they have experienced as a result.

Supporting Documentation

(7) Wherever possible, students should attach documentary evidence to support their grievance. It is normally not sufficient for a student to claim the existence of certain circumstances or the performance of certain actions or a

change of circumstances without providing supporting evidence which verifies their claims. Students should make every effort to support their claim by providing independent evidence. Documents provided to support the grievance must be original or certified copies. They must be in English or official translations must be supplied.

(8) Examples:

- a. If the course profile was changed mid-semester, a student should show how it was changed by providing copies of the two versions;
- b. If a student received correspondence (e.g. letter or email) that is relevant to the grievance, they should attach a copy.

Describing Steps Taken

(9) Students must describe what steps they have taken to date to attempt to resolve the grievance.

(10) Examples:

- a. If a student spoke to the Course Coordinator about the issue, they must say when they talked to them and what happened;
- b. If a student sought advice from the Student Centre or Faculty Office, they must say what advice they were given, when and by whom.

Submitting a Complaint

(11) Students can submit complaint letters and support materials via the University's complaints management system or as a hard-copy to a UQ Student Centre. Students are encouraged to submit letters and materials electronically as it reduces the time before their grievance is considered by an appropriate decision-maker.

Attending an Interview

(12) In seeking to work towards informal resolution of a grievance, a student may initiate a meeting with University staff, or as part of an investigation into a grievance, the student may be invited to attend an interview to discuss their concerns. In either case the student is entitled to take a support person with them to the interview.

Appeal Guidelines for Students

(13) Where a student is not satisfied with the outcome of a grievance resolution process or a decision made in accordance with University policy, procedures and rules, the student may appeal the outcome with an appropriate body as noted in the Decision-Maker Tables of [Student Grievance Resolution Procedure](#). The nature of the grievance will determine both the decision-maker and the timeframe available to appeal.

Stating the Issue

(14) When preparing an appeal students should state clearly the decision against which they are appealing, including referencing any legislation or policy as appropriate, and they should explain the grounds of their appeal.

(15) Examples:

- a. A student may believe a University policy, procedure or rule has been applied incorrectly in their circumstance, in which case, they should say what University policy, procedure or rule they are referring to and describe what they believe the error is.
- b. A student may feel they have been treated less favourably than other students in the application of a policy, procedure or rule, in which case, they should give specific examples of other students that can be checked to

validate their claims.

- c. A student may feel a decision made in regard to a case of harassment or discrimination was inadequate to resolve an issue.

Level of Detail

(16) Students must be as specific as possible about the circumstances relating to their appeal.

(17) Examples:

- a. If a student claims they were told by a member of staff to take a particular course of action, the student must state who gave them that advice and when.
- b. If a student was prevented from completing assessment by the due date, the student must explain the reasons for this and the steps they took (what, when and with whom they corresponded), to address those circumstances in a timely manner.

Supporting Documentation

(18) Wherever possible students should attach documentary evidence to their appeal. It is normally not sufficient for a student to claim the existence of certain circumstances, or the performance of certain actions, or a change of circumstances, without providing supporting evidence which verifies these claims. It is insufficient to simply say what happened or what changed. Students should make every effort to support what they say by providing independent evidence.

(19) Examples:

- a. If a student was sick, they must provide a medical certificate.
- b. If a student received correspondence (e.g. letter or email) that is relevant to the appeal, they must attach a copy.

Submitting an Appeal

(20) Students can submit appeal letters and support materials via the University's complaints management system or as a hard-copy to a UQ Student Centre. Students are encouraged to submit letters and materials electronically, as it reduces the time before their appeal is considered by an appropriate decision-maker and is linked in the system to the original grievance if it had been submitted via the University's complaints management system.

(21) For further information on the process for appeals to Student Academic Administrative Appeals Committee, refer to [Academic Administrative Appeals by Students Policy](#).

External Avenues for Grievance Resolution

(22) Students wishing to take the matter to the [National Student Ombudsman](#) should be aware that the Ombudsman would normally focus on issues of procedural compliance or fairness in the decision making process rather than matters concerning academic judgment. The Ombudsman may decline to investigate a complaint if the student making the complaint has not first attempted to resolve the problem through The University's grievance resolution process.

(23) The [National Student Ombudsman](#) should be contacted for specific advice regarding particular circumstances.

Guidelines for Staff

Roles and responsibilities

(24) All staff should, within the limits of their authority, assist students to resolve problems or concerns as quickly and early as possible with a view to avoiding them escalating to the level of a formal complaint.

(25) While staff may be faced with behaviour they consider rude or unreasonable, or with problems or concerns that may seem trivial or ill-founded, staff should listen calmly, attentively and dispassionately and focus on realistic ways to help the student resolve their problem or concern. If the problem cannot be solved at the informal level, the student should be referred to [Student Grievance Resolution Procedure](#) to guide their next steps in the grievance resolution process.

(26) In certain instances, senior staff may believe an issue is so serious it should be managed under either student or staff misconduct procedures. In such cases, advice should be sought from the Academic Registrar and/or Director, People Services as appropriate.

Decision-makers

Identify the Key Issues

(27) The first step in any decision-making process or investigation is to correctly identify the key issues so the correct grievance resolution pathway can be followed and the correct decision-maker can be identified to facilitate the grievance resolution process.

(28) Once identified, the decision-maker may conduct their own exploration of the issues, or may call upon another impartial person to investigate the grievance or appeal on their behalf.

(29) During this stage, the decision-maker will need to consider:

- a. relevant legislative provisions;
- b. relevant University rules, policies and procedures;
- c. information available that may be relevant to the grievance or appeal; and
- d. what additional information needs to be gathered to consider the grievance or appeal.

Record Keeping

(30) Accurate record keeping is an important component of good administrative practice. This concept is supported by the obligation imposed on public agencies, including Universities, by s.7 of the [Public Records Act 2002](#), to make and keep full and accurate records of their activities.

(31) The obligation covers:

- a. oral communications, including telephone calls that are significant in relevance to a grievance or appeal;
- b. written communications, including emails and faxes; and
- c. events and actions, including internal or external meetings, that are relevant to the decision to be made.

(32) Records should be made simultaneously or as soon as practicable following the communication, event or action to which they relate.

(33) Good record keeping:

- a. improves decision-making by providing decision-makers with detailed information on which to base their decisions;
- b. assists decision-makers to prepare a comprehensive statement of reasons if required;

- c. enables the University to establish how a particular decision was made, in the event that the decision is challenged or is the subject of external review;
- d. protects individual staff members and the University from criticism by providing a means to explain the rationale behind a decision; and
- e. enhances transparency by enabling the University to respond meaningfully and efficiently to requests under the [Right to Information Act 2009](#).

(34) Good record keeping enhances accountability in the grievance and appeal processes.

Time Limits

(35) The process to resolve a formal grievance should commence no later than 10 business days after receipt by the University of the grievance or appeal, unless a different timeframe is stated in the relevant policy. All reasonable measures should be taken by the decision-maker to ensure the matter is finalised as soon as practicable.

Assessing the Evidence

(36) Staff who decide (or make recommendations to a decision-maker about) a complaint or an appeal, must assess the evidence fairly and objectively and base their recommendations or decisions on all relevant evidence. Evidence is relevant when it is logically probative and rationally leads to the conclusions drawn about a particular fact that is at issue (whether alone or combined with other evidence). Irrelevant evidence must always be disregarded. If there is a conflict in evidence about a particular version of events, efforts should be made to try and corroborate those versions to ascertain which should logically be considered over the other.

Maintaining Student's Enrolment During Grievance Resolution

(37) A student's enrolment should be maintained during grievance resolution process if the procedures for lodging a complaint and appeal have been appropriately followed by the student. Examples when student enrolment should be maintained include:

- a. the period during external appeal, if the student exhausted internal grievance resolution options first before appealing to an external appeal body; and
- b. the period during appealing a re-mark decision where the failing grade may prevent progression. Maintaining enrolment does not enable the student to enrol into courses they are not entitled to.

Useful Resources

(38) Useful resources include:

- a. Information related to [student grievances](#) on [my.UQ](#).
- b. [UQ Union](#)
- c. [Student Support Services](#).
- d. [Academic Administrative Appeals by Students Policy](#).

(39) Extracts from the following publications were used in the compilation of this Guideline:

- a. Jackson, J., Fleming, H., Kamvounias, P., & Varnham, S. (2009). Student Grievances & Discipline Matters Project: Final Report to Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- b. NSW Ombudsman. (2006). Complaint Handling at Universities: Best Practice Guidelines. Sydney, NSW, Australia.
- c. NSW Ombudsman. (2009). Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Practice Manual. Sydney, NSW,

Australia.

- d. Ombudsman, Western Australia. (Undated). GUIDELINES - Conducting administrative investigations. Perth, Western Australia, Australia.
- e. Queensland Ombudsman (2013). GOOD DECISION-MAKING GUIDE - Good decisions make good sense, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

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