



## Union Advice Service

### Guide to Complaints

The Complaints Procedure is used for students to express that they are dissatisfied with the University. Complaints can be made about one or more of the following (This is not an exhaustive list):

- *Non-academic services provided by the university.*
- *The administration or delivery of a programme.*
- *The facilities or learning resources provided by the University.*
- *Failure to meet obligations set out in programmes, college, or student handbooks.*
- *Failure to follow published regulations, procedures and/or policies.*

The Complaint Process has three main stages:

✓ **Stage 1: Early resolution**

From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021, where concerns or complaints are made at informal stage 1 (early resolution) you should submit your Stage 1 Complaint to your College/Service Area within 3 months of the incident about which you are complaining.

If you are seeking to submit a complaint outside of this timeframe, you must provide a valid, evidenced reason in your complaint.

Your department will need to complete the [stage 1 complaint form](#) and have 14 days to provide you with an outcome.

You should email a summary of your complaint to their College Complaints email address, listed below:

- College of Business, Arts, and Social Sciences - [Complaints-cbass@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Complaints-cbass@brunel.ac.uk)
- College of Engineering, Design, and Physical Sciences - [Complaints-cedps@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Complaints-cedps@brunel.ac.uk)
- College of Health and Life Sciences – [Acsm-chmls@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Acsm-chmls@brunel.ac.uk)
- Library - [Library@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Library@brunel.ac.uk)
- Records – [Records@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Records@brunel.ac.uk)
- Residences – [Res@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Res@brunel.ac.uk)
- Sports Centre - [Mark.Burgess@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Mark.Burgess@brunel.ac.uk)

✓ **Stage 2: Formal Appeal**

If your concerns have not been resolved in stage 1 then you must complete a [Complaints Action Form](#) with supporting evidence.

This must be sent to the Student Complaints Officer at [student-complaints@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:student-complaints@brunel.ac.uk) **within 3 months of the incidence complained about.**

If you submit a complaint outside of this timeline, you should provide a valid, evidenced reason in your complaint.

Your Stage 2 Complaint should normally take no longer than 49 calendar days to conclude.

✓ **Stage 3: Review**

If after Stage 2 you are unhappy with outcome, you can request a review from the Chief Operating Officer as long as you can show that you have the grounds to do so.

**This should be made in writing and submitted within 14 days of the letter of the outcome of the stage 2 complaint.**

If you submit a complaint outside of this timeline, you should provide a valid, evidenced reason in your complaint.

Your Stage 3 Complaint should normally take no longer than 21 calendar days to conclude.

**Before you start**

Before you decide to pursue a formal complaint, you must first consider whether a complaint is the most appropriate avenue, other possibilities to consider could be:

- **Report and Support** Report a concern anonymously or with details on issues ranging from harassment, to bullying to mental wellbeing. You can log this via report and support: <https://intra.brunel.ac.uk/s/student-welfare-team> Click the raise a welfare concern button.
- **Mediation**: The aim of the University Mediation Service is to resolve problems quickly and easily. Mediation Service can run alongside the Complaints Procedure.
- **Student Representatives**: are there for you to provide feedback to and they will raise issues at the Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs). [Who Represents You? \(brunelstudents.com\)](#)

## **About this Guide**

The University has some very detailed guidance, [Complaints Guidance and Procedures](#), which you should also refer to, to ensure that you fully understand the process.

Further down the Advice Service Guide we have provided some tips and information to help you put forward the best case possible and inform you of what is required. It is essential that you familiarise yourself with the process and then use the tips contained in our guide to make sure your appeal does your case justice.

## **Appeal stages**

The complaints process has three main stages:

### **Stage 1: Early resolution**

From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021, where concerns or complaints are made at informal stage 1 (early resolution) you should submit your Stage 1 Complaint to your College/Service Area within 3 months of the incident about which you are complaining.

If you are seeking to submit a complaint outside of this timeframe, you must provide a valid, evidenced reason in your complaint.

Your department will need to complete the [stage 1 complaint form](#) and have 14 days to provide you with an outcome.

You should email a summary of your complaint to their College Complaints email address, listed below:

- College of Business, Arts, and Social Sciences - [Complaints-cbass@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Complaints-cbass@brunel.ac.uk)
- College of Engineering, Design, and Physical Sciences - [Complaints-cedps@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Complaints-cedps@brunel.ac.uk)
- College of Health and Life Sciences – [Acsm-chmls@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Acsm-chmls@brunel.ac.uk)
- Library - [Library@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Library@brunel.ac.uk)
- Records – [Records@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Records@brunel.ac.uk)
- Residences – [Res@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Res@brunel.ac.uk)
- Sports Centre - [Mark.Burgess@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Mark.Burgess@brunel.ac.uk)

When the department provide a response to your Stage 1 complaint, they should ensure that they include the following:

- Full names of anyone present at this meeting.
- A brief summary of the details of the complaint.
- What, if any, evidence you have provided.
- What, if any, action will be/has been taken as a result.
- A brief summary of anything else discussed at this meeting.

It is important for the department to have a record of the conversation held at Stage 1 in order to support the investigation of a complaint should it be pursued at Stage 2.

This record does not need to be made on a particular form and can simply be an email. A copy of any record made must also be sent to you, the student and any other attendees of the meeting.

### **Stage 2: Formal Complaint Action Form**

So, you are dissatisfied with the informal resolution of step 1. You can now complete a Complaint Action Form and provide supporting evidence.

Please send this to the Students Complaint Officer at [student-complaints@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:student-complaints@brunel.ac.uk) within **3 months of the incident complained about**.

Failure to do so without good reason means the student complaint officer may not consider your complaint as eligible.

If your concerns have not been resolved in stage 1 then you must complete a [Complaints Action Form](#) with supporting evidence.

This must be sent to the Student Complaints Officer at [student-complaints@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:student-complaints@brunel.ac.uk) **within 3 months of the incidence complained about**.

If you submit a complaint outside of this timeline, you should provide a valid, evidenced reason in your complaint.

If the stage 2 complaint does meet the criteria the Student Complaints Officer may arrange a meeting with you to discuss the complaint.

The guidance to the complaint's procedure outlines that a current student or member of staff at the university or an Advice Service adviser are permitted to attend in form of support during the meeting.

Your Stage 2 Complaint should normally take no longer than 49 calendar days to conclude.

### **Stage 3: Chief Operating Officer**

If you are still dissatisfied, then you can request a review by the Chief Operating Officer.

You should submit your Stage 3 Complaint within 14 calendar days of the conclusion of your Stage 2 Complaint.

If you submit a complaint outside of this timeline, you should provide a valid, evidenced reason in your complaint.

Your Stage 3 Complaint should normally take no longer than 21 calendar days to conclude.

Send the Stage 3 complaint to the chief operating officer at [COOcomplaints@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:COOcomplaints@brunel.ac.uk)

**If your review is rejected then the OIA is the next potential step, please see ARC Guide on OIA. [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education - OIAHE](#)**

### **Making a start – compile a timeline of events**

It is often difficult to know where to start in explaining an issue that has arisen or to explain someone's improper behaviour. You may feel worried that making a complaint will have bad consequences for you, but the complaint process is confidential and your complaint will be dealt with in a professional manner. The University promises that **your career in the University will not be prejudiced by your having submitted a genuine complaint.**

You need to remember:

- That dates are vital, if you are not clear about when things happened, it is very unlikely your complaint will be upheld.
- It is also important that you are clear on how these circumstances have impacted on you directly, what this has meant for you.
- Think about whether you took steps to try and resolve the problem before submitting a complaint (if you jump straight to a complaint this won't look particularly good).
- If you believe that rules or policies have been breached then you must explicitly specify what rules or policy has actually been broken or not adhered too.
- Are you being reasonable? Sometimes we can be sensitive to particular issues, so you must be very clear that you are being reasonable in your complaint.

### **Draft your statement**

Do not assume that the person looking into your complaint knows you; you should ensure you provide all of the detail necessary regardless of who will be making a decision on it.

When drafting your statement ensure that you all of the information is there, your department will not read between the lines or make their own conclusions- if the information and evidence is not there, it will not be considered.

Avoid making comments that are not substantiated by evidence and steer clear of making personal or rude comments; this could get you in trouble.

### **Add some detail**

Going over distressing, personal events can be difficult and upsetting so you may need to revisit your draft more than once.

It is better that you provide too much information as opposed to not enough but make sure it is relevant (stick to your case and do not focus on any other students' experience).

Your personal information will be kept confidentially so it is vital that you explain exactly:

- What has happened?
- When it happened?
- What you did about it, actions you may have taken to resolve the matter?
- Has this impacted on you academically?
- What do you expect to happen as a result of your complaint?

### **Evidence**

Evidence is an absolute necessity; it is important that you get some sort of evidence to back up what you have said. This is sometimes difficult particularly when it comes to a verbal conversation.

You need to explain what the evidence shows and how it substantiates your claim.

If you are struggling to get hold of relevant evidence, then you need to think outside the box. Think about whom you've talked too or who has witnessed the incident. Think about course colleagues or other people that could provide some form of evidence.

If you have evidence in another language then it may be that you are required to get the documents translated which could take some time.

### **Group Complaints**

The University will not accept complaints made on behalf of another student. However, if a group of students have experienced the same issue, you can submit a group complaint.

When submitting a group complaint, you should ensure that:

- All students have provided their names and student numbers and have signed the Stage 2 Complaint Form;
- One of the students has been clearly nominated as the Group Lead (the Student Complaints Officer will only communicate with the Group Lead about the complaint, and they will be expected to distribute these communications to the Group.

The University cannot be held responsible if the nominated Group Lead fails to communicate any information.

### **Mediation**

The University has a free mediation service run by the Student Support Team to help resolve issues quickly with an independent and impartial mediator. If you would like to find out more about mediation, or if you think mediation may help resolve your complaint, information can be found here or by contacting the Student Support and Welfare Team on

[studentsupport@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:studentsupport@brunel.ac.uk). If you engage with mediation but are not able to resolve the issue, you will still be entitled to submit a complaint.

### **Top Tips**

1. Keep it short and clear- no one will read and empathise with 18 pages of ranting.
2. You may feel angry- but do not write an angry letter; you are more likely to be heard if you are calm and reasonable. Remember- co-operation is in your best interest.
3. Use facts and evidence only- exaggerated claims will damage your credibility and your whole complaint might not be seen as believable.
4. Explain what you want to achieve.
5. Always keep copies of any correspondence you have in case you need to refer to it at a later date.
6. You do not need to use any special legal language when making a complaint but do make sure you are clear and concise. Get help in reading through your complaint letter from someone who is not as upset or emotional as you.
7. It is more likely that people will be sympathetic to your complaint if you are courteous and respectful. Try and avoid emotive phrasing and make sure that you can back up the statements that you make.
8. Avoid personal attacks no matter how upset you are.

### **Who can help me make a complaint?**

- If your complaint is related to an academic concern-your [course or College representative](#) may be able to assist you and raise broader issues at College meetings.
- A Student adviser from the **Advice Service** in the Students' Union can also assist you in identifying who you should complain to, and how to use the complaints procedure. They may also be able to represent you to the University where appropriate. Contacting the Union allows its officers to identify patterns and common problems and they may be able to raise them at Senior University Committee level or with Heads of University Services.

### **What advice and help can I expect from the Advice Service?**

The Advice Service can help you in the following ways:

- Help you to understand the complaint process
- Talk through with you what has gone wrong and how to convey this to your College and the University
- Help you to identify valid grounds for a complaint
- Check draft letters and statements before you submit them
- Help you decide whether your expected outcomes are realistic
- Discuss alternative options

Email: [advice@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:advice@brunel.ac.uk)

Enquiry Form: <https://www.emailmeform.com/builder/form/MJ62b3cbofS9anZ3c>

Website: [brunelstudents.com/advice](http://brunelstudents.com/advice)