

## Student Complaints Procedures

### Table of Contents

1. Governing Policy
2. Purpose
3. Procedures
  - 3.1. Process Overview
  - 3.2. Informal resolution of issues
  - 3.3. Lodging a formal complaint
  - 3.4. Complaint preliminary assessment and triage
  - 3.5. Complaint management
  - 3.7. Investigations
  - 3.8. Decisions in complaint matters
  - 3.9. Review of complaint decisions
  - 3.10. Appeals of complaint decisions
  - 3.11. Information management and recordkeeping
4. Responsibilities and Authorities
5. Forms

### 1. Governing Policy

[Student Complaints Policy](#)

### 2. Purpose

These procedures describe the processes that will be applied by Flinders University in receiving and resolving complaints from its students.

### 3. Procedures

#### 3.1. Process Overview

- a. When a student has an issue or complaint, there are four key internal processes that may be employed to resolve the matter:
  - i. Informal resolution: Staff and students are expected to try to resolve problems at the local level (if reasonable and appropriate to do so) before making a complaint.
  - ii. Formal complaint: When an issue cannot be resolved at the local level, the student may lodge a complaint in writing via Student Policy and Integrity Services. Student Policy and Integrity Services will perform an initial assessment of the complaint and will refer it to the most appropriate part of the University for resolution.
  - iii. Review: Once a decision is made in a complaint matter, a student may request a review of the decision. Reviews are performed by an appropriate senior officer in the part of the University to which the complaint pertains as specified in the [Student Review and Appeal Policy](#) and [Student Review and Appeal Procedures](#).

- 
- iv. Appeal: If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of a review, and they meet one of the prescribed appeal grounds in the [Student Review and Appeal Policy](#), they may lodge an appeal through the University's appeals process as specified in that policy.

### 3.2. Informal resolution of issues

- a. Students are expected to attempt to resolve matters in good faith at the local level, where it is reasonable and appropriate to do so, before lodging a complaint.
- b. Not all matters are suitable for informal resolution. Matters involving allegations of serious misconduct should not be addressed informally and should be referred to the formal complaints process.
- c. Students are encouraged to specifically name their issues and, if possible, propose solutions.
- d. Students can access support and assistance from [Flinders support services](#) at any time in an informal resolution process.
- e. Once a student has identified the issues and thought about solutions, either by themselves or with the help of a support service or person, they are encouraged to speak directly with the staff member or student responsible for the particular issue if they feel safe and comfortable to do so.
- f. Students may seek assistance from [Flinders support services](#) in conducting conversations with other students or staff members, which may include mediation if appropriate and acceptable to all parties.
- g. The staff member who becomes aware of a student issue:
  - i. should endeavour to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of all parties if possible
  - ii. may refer the issue to a manager or supervisor from within the College/Portfolio area if appropriate
  - iii. may request Student Policy and Integrity Services arrange mediation, if appropriate and acceptable to all parties, or
  - iv. where the matter is not suitable for informal resolution, or where any of the parties believe that a matter may be serious and/or complex, contact Student Policy and Integrity Services as soon as practicable for advice.
- h. In attempting to resolve a student issue at the local level, the relevant staff member may employ a range of strategies, including but not limited to:
  - i. preliminary enquiries and seeking advice if required
  - ii. problem-solving and remedial intervention
  - iii. referral to other staff or support services, such as Health, Counselling and Disability Services
  - iv. facilitated discussions between parties
  - v. referring the student, or the complaint, to Student Policy and Integrity Services.
- i. Informal resolutions are achieved with the agreement of both the student who raised the issue and the person with whom they had the issue. They do not involve a ruling by a higher authority.
- j. Accurate and complete records of informal resolutions must be created and maintained by the staff member involved in the resolution.
- k. An informal resolution which involves a decision that is communicated in writing is considered to be a determination or decision by the University which may be reviewed in accordance with the [Student Review and Appeal Procedures](#) without proceeding to a formal complaint. Informal resolutions that do not involve a decision communicated in writing can be lodged as a formal complaint if the informal resolution proves unsuccessful.

### 3.3. Lodging a formal complaint

- a. If an issue cannot be, or is not suitable to be, resolved informally, students may make a complaint using the University's [lodgement process](#).
- b. Complaints will be acknowledged in writing as soon as possible following receipt.

- 
- c. Students may obtain assistance in formulating their complaint from Student Assist or from any other third party of their choosing (e.g. advocacy groups, legal representatives, friends or family members). However, complaints must be lodged in a student's own words and under their own name. Complaints may be lodged on students' behalf by Student Assist, but complaints lodged by external third parties (e.g. legal representatives or parents) will not be accepted.
  - d. Students may lodge a complaint as a group, but the person lodging the complaint must provide evidence of all named students' consent to the lodgement of the complaint.
  - e. When making a complaint, students should:
    - i. clearly state the nature and details of the complaint and provide any facts or documentation regarding it
    - ii. provide details of informal attempts to resolve the matter, or the reasons for bypassing the informal resolution process. For example: serious behavioural matters involving sexual harassment, discrimination, and bullying are often not suitable for local level resolution
    - iii. propose the outcome sought. Students should be aware that not all complaints will result in the outcome they seek.
  - f. Complaints must be raised in a timely fashion. Generally, the University will not consider complaints lodged more than 6 months after the issue occurs, unless the University considers that the circumstances warrant it.

### **3.4. Complaint preliminary assessment and triage**

- a. When a complaint is lodged, a preliminary assessment and triage is performed by Student Policy and Integrity Services. This involves:
  - i. prioritising complaints for action
  - ii. determining what type of complaint is involved – academic, administrative, behavioural, or other
  - iii. assessing the nature and substance of the complaint
  - iv. ensuring that the complaint does not duplicate or substantially overlap with any legal action underway on the same matter and
  - v. determining the correct referral point for complaint resolution.
- b. In assessing the complaint, Student Policy and Integrity Services may:
  - i. contact the student and any other party/parties to a complaint in order to gather information
  - ii. if appropriate, contact the student to propose that informal resolution be attempted (if it has not been)
  - iii. seek to clarify information relevant to the matter
  - iv. provide further information on the complaint process and next steps to the student
  - v. provide relevant information arising from the complaint as feedback to the College / Portfolio area
  - vi. refer the matter to a different University process or service if it is not actually a complaint (e.g. fee issues, admissions matters, academic progress, misconduct, safer community etc.)
  - vii. dismiss the complaint if it is out of time, vexatious, without merit or otherwise represents an abuse of process.
- c. Preliminary assessment of complaints will be done in a timely fashion, commencing no later than 10 University business days after the complaint is received.
- d. Students will receive notification of either the outcome or the proposed next steps with their complaint within 28 University business days after the complaint is received.

### 3.5. Complaint management

a. Student complaints will be referred by Student Policy and Integrity Services and addressed as detailed in the table below.

Nature of Complaint	Referred to	Methods of Resolution Available	Decisions available	Decision-maker
Any aspect of an academic program (excepting assessment and academic progress)	Dean (Education) or nominee in relevant College  *Where the Dean (Education) is the subject of the complaint, the matter must be referred to the Vice-President & Executive Dean  HDR Coordinator for higher degree by research students	- Facilitated conversations - Fact-finding activities - Conducting an investigation (see below)	The complaint can be substantiated in whole or in part, or dismissed	Dean (Education) or nominee  * Where the Dean (Education) is the subject of the complaint, Vice-President & Executive Dean  HDR Coordinator for higher degree by research students
Any administrative or fees related matter	Appropriate branch of University administration	Fact-finding activities	- The complaint can be substantiated in whole or in part, or dismissed - Rectifications of administrative errors, including fee adjustment as appropriate	Appropriate officer
Assessment matters  (note: for HDR examination matters see <a href="#">HDR Examination Procedures</a> )	Topic Coordinator for relevant topic  Course Coordinator for Honours students  *Where the Topic or Course Coordinator was involved in the disputed assessment, the matter will be referred to the next most senior academic staff member	Refer to the <a href="#">Assessment Policy</a>  - Review disputed assessment items - Facilitated conversations - Fact-finding activities	- Remarking of the assessment - Allowing for resubmission of the assessment - Upholding the initial assessment outcome	Topic / Course Coordinator / Other academic staff member as required

Academic progress matters	Academic progress process	Refer to <a href="#">Student Progress Policy</a> and its processes or <a href="#">HDR Policy</a> for higher degree by research students	N/A	N/A
Behaviour of a student	Deputy Vice Chancellor (Students) or nominee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitated conversations</li> <li>- Fact-finding activities</li> <li>- Conducting an investigation (see below)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The complaint can be substantiated in whole or in part, or dismissed</li> <li>- Where appropriate, the complaint may be referred to the student misconduct process, as outlined in the <a href="#">Student Conduct (Statute 6.4)</a>, for the application of penalties</li> </ul>	DVC (Students) or nominee
Behaviour of a staff member	Director, People & Culture or nominee	Treated as a staff misconduct matter under the relevant misconduct provisions of the Enterprise Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The complaint can be substantiated in whole or in part, or dismissed</li> <li>- Where appropriate, penalties may be applied in accordance with staff misconduct processes</li> </ul>	Director, People and Culture

- b. Where a complaint is referred to another process of the University for resolution (e.g. student conduct or staff misconduct matters), Student Policy and Integrity Services will advise the student of this and will provide them with contact details for the person or area handling the matter.
- c. All staff members involved in resolving a complaint must be free from bias and not have a real or perceived conflict of interest, including prior involvement in handling the complaint.
- d. Student Policy and Integrity Services will provide support and assistance to staff involved in resolving complaints.
- e. Complaints may be addressed using a range of approaches as appropriate. These include:
  - i. fact-finding activities (e.g. requesting documentation, checking data systems, conducting conversations and interviews)
  - ii. facilitated conversations involving the student and other parties
  - iii. investigations (see procedure 3.6 below).
- f. The decision-maker will make a determination regarding the complaint and will:
  - i. inform the student and any respondents of the outcome, reasons for the outcome, any proposed actions to follow, and their option to request a review of the decision
  - ii. provide a summary statement of the outcome and actions to Student Policy and Integrity Services for recording purposes.

---

### 3.7. Investigations

- a. A formal investigative process may be used:
  - i. where the person with responsibility for addressing the complaint believes it is warranted or would be useful, or
  - ii. where Student Policy and Integrity Services assesses the complaint as being of a seriousness or complexity that an investigative process is necessary.
- b. Where an investigative process is used, an investigator will be appointed by the Senior Student Policy and Integrity Advisor in consultation with the relevant senior officer. This may be an internal or external person, but will be a person with appropriate skills and training to conduct the investigation, and with no conflict of interest or prior involvement in the matter.
- c. The investigator will:
  - i. conduct the investigation with due regard to procedural fairness, timeliness, and the individuals safety and well-being
  - ii. notify the parties of the investigation
  - iii. seek sufficient particulars of the alleged conduct to enable the complaint/concern to be factually investigated
  - iv. provide the respondent (if any) with a summary of allegations and/or a statement of the alleged conduct
  - v. provide the respondent (if any) with an opportunity to respond to the complaint and/or alleged conduct
  - vi. if possible and appropriate, interview the parties and any witnesses
  - vii. review any relevant documentation, and
  - viii. prepare a report setting out the complaint, how the investigation was conducted, relevant facts, and findings, and present this to the relevant decision-maker.
- d. The investigation will result in a decision by the decision-maker (see table above), which will be communicated to the student. The decision and the reasons for it will be recorded by Student Policy and Integrity Services.

### 3.8. Decisions in complaint matters

- a. A complaint that is addressed as a formal complaint matter will be found to be either:
  - i. substantiated
  - ii. substantiated in part or
  - iii. not substantiated.
- b. A determination that the complaint is substantiated wholly or in part may lead to any combination of the following outcomes, or any other outcome appropriate in the circumstances:
  - i. rectification of administrative or academic error
  - ii. implementation of negotiated solution
  - iii. a direction of no contact by any means or for any reason
  - iv. intervention by an academic staff member
  - v. referral to another process within the University (e.g. student progress process)
  - vi. misconduct action.
- c. Decisions in complaint matters must be communicated to the student as soon as is practicable once the decision has been made.

### 3.9. Review of complaint decisions

- a. A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint may request a review of the decision as specified in the [Student Review and Appeal Policy](#), except where a complaint is referred to another process of the University (e.g. student conduct or staff misconduct matters).
- b. The review process is detailed in section 3.2 of the [Student Review and Appeal Procedures](#).

### 3.10. Appeals of complaint decisions

- a. A student who remains dissatisfied after the review may appeal the review decision if they have one or more relevant grounds as specified in the [Student Review and Appeal Policy](#).
- b. The appeals process is detailed in the [Student Review and Appeal Procedures](#).

### 3.11. Information management and recordkeeping

- a. Full and accurate records will be kept of all complaint, review and appeals matters, their investigation (if relevant) and their resolution.
- b. Student Policy and Integrity Services will ensure that key information is captured centrally for each complaint that is lodged via the complaints process.
- c. Staff involved in complaint matters at any level must also ensure that full and accurate information is recorded regarding the complaint and any resolution reached.
- d. Deidentified complaints data will be reported on in a regular and systematic manner.

## 4. Responsibilities and Authorities

<b>Student</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Provides a statement of the nature of the complaint, giving as many details as possible.</li><li>b. Co-operates with the investigation process as required.</li></ol>
<b>Student Policy and Integrity Services</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>c. Receives, assesses and triages student complaints.</li><li>d. Provides relevant information to both staff and students in resolution of complaint matters.</li><li>e. Facilitates the handling of complaints and provides administrative oversight of the referral process.</li><li>f. Ensures full and accurate records of complaints are made and maintained</li></ol>
<b>Topic Coordinators</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>g. Receives, and manages resolution of, complaints regarding topic assessments.</li></ol>
<b>Course Coordinators</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>h. Receives, and manages resolution of, complaints regarding Honours assessments.</li></ol>
<b>HDR Coordinators</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Receives, and manages resolution of, complaints regarding higher degrees by research academic and progress matters.</li></ol>
<b>Dean (Education) or nominee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>j. Receives, and manages resolution of, complaints regarding academic matters other than assessment.</li></ol>
<b>Vice-President &amp; Executive Deans or nominees</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>k. Receives, and manages resolution of, complaints regarding the relevant Dean (Education).</li></ol>
<b>Director, People and Culture</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>l. Acts as the decision-maker in complaints about the behaviour of staff.</li></ol>

<b>Deputy Vice Chancellor (Students) or nominee</b>	m. Acts as the decision-maker in complaints about the behaviour of students.
<b>Member of Senior Executive Team nominated by the Vice-Chancellor</b>	n. Acts as the decision-maker in complaints about the behaviour of students where the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students) has had previous involvement in the matter.
<b>Senior Student Policy and Integrity Advisor</b>	o. Appoints investigators where required.

## 5. Forms

Student complaints [lodgement process](#)

<b>Approval Authority</b>	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students)
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students)
<b>Approval Date</b>	29 November 2018
<b>Effective Date</b>	1 January 2019
<b>Review Date*</b>	November 2021
<b>HPRM file number</b>	CF18/1040

\* Unless otherwise indicated, this procedure will still apply beyond the review date.

Printed versions of this document are not controlled. Please refer to the Flinders Policy Library for the latest version.