Student Complaints

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## 1.0 Purpose

The University is committed to promoting a complaints friendly culture, whereby complaints lead to useful information for the improvement of its services, by providing an easily accessible and responsive complaints handling process for students. Students have the right to make a complaint and to provide feedback about the University’s services and processes. Complaints made to the University are considered with courtesy, with due regard to confidentiality, and without fear of prejudicial treatment. All students are afforded procedural fairness, being a fair opportunity to present their complaint and the right to have it considered by an unbiased decision-maker and resolved in a timely fashion.

## 2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all students (non-award, undergraduate, postgraduate and research) of the University who wish to raise a problem or concern regarding their treatment as a student, the quality or delivery of a service provided by the University or the conduct of staff as being not in accordance with the expectations set out in the Student Charter, regardless of the location of those studies and whether they are conducted on-campus or off-campus.

There is no assurance that all complaints may be resolved to the satisfaction of the student, particularly if they are related to the availability of resources for example, the timing and location of clinical placements or access to specialised facilities outside of the University’s standard operating hours.

This policy is accompanied by the Student Complaints Procedures. The Student Complaints Policy and the Student Complaints Procedures are complementary and should be considered in conjunction with each other.

## 3.0 Policy statement

### 3.1 General Principles

As a general principle, staff and students are mutually responsible for resolving problems quickly through discussion and/or in writing at the local level, limiting the number of people involved to a minimum, for the purpose of avoiding an escalation of the problem in scope and impact.

In resolving problems, interactions amongst students and staff, including those mediated through online application business systems, are to be based on mutual respect, fairness and fulfilment of their obligations as specified in the Student Charter. Students should consider the issue calmly and present their complaint in a measured and courteous manner upon which the University can reflect, identify how it may improve its performance and respond in a respectful way. Students who use aggressive, malicious or defamatory language in making complaints to or about staff or other students may not facilitate resolution of their concern.

As a general principle a complaint is to be made independently of an application for review or appeal of a decision/s. To determine whether the matter is a reviewable decision, refer to the Student Review and Appeals Policy.

When a student requests a review of, or appeals, a University decision the student may also have a complaint about their treatment, quality of a service or conduct of staff or students. The review officer or appeal body may not be in a position to respond to the complaint when considering the review or appeal. In such instances, the student may make a complaint in accordance with the Student Complaints Policy, which will be considered separately from the review or appeal of the decision by the appropriate University officer.

### 3.2 Student Enrolment

In order to make a complaint in accordance with this policy the complainant is to be a ‘student’ of the University as defined in section 5 of the Student Complaints Procedures. For the student’s complaint to be considered and properly or fully investigated in accordance with the Student Complaints Procedures, the student must maintain an active enrolment status with the University while the internal complaint handling process is ongoing.

### 3.3 Anonymous Complaints

It is recognised in some instances students may choose to make a complaint anonymously. While the University treats complaints reported anonymously seriously, it may be unable to either properly or fully investigate such a complaint or provide a decision or take action to resolve the complaint when the source of the complaint is unknown.

### 3.4 Student Cohort Complaints

Where a student cohort or several students have the same complaint, those students may act as a group in making a complaint, provided that each student is seeking the same outcome.

### 3.5 Age of Complaint

A complaint will be investigated if the student has made it within 12 months or less from the event that is the subject of the complaint. Where a complaint is older than 12 months, in acknowledging its receipt, the relevant University staff member will advise that the University is unable to investigate it, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

### 3.6 Roles and Responsibilities in Student Complaint Handling

[Table 1](#Table1) sets out the responsible officers for handling student complaints. The Student Ombudsman provides leadership in the handling of student complaints at the University. The Student Ombudsman considers complaints which arise from students, investigates as far as possible whether the University has acted fairly and reasonably and ensures matters are dealt with in a consistent and procedurally fair manner. The Student Ombudsman is not a decision-maker but may make recommendations to the responsible officer of the University Executive to resolve a complaint or to address systemic issues.

### 3.7 Process

The process of making a complaint is governed by the Student Complaints Procedures. The process has three steps:

* Step 1 Resolve the concern informally
* Step 2 Make a complaint to the relevant University Staff member
* Step 3 Refer the complaint to the Student Ombudsman

The process is illustrated as a flow chart in [Diagram 1](#Diagram1) below, which is intended to be a useful guide for students on the process. However, students who are making a complaint must have reference to the Student Complaints Procedures which governs the process of making a complaint.

DIAGRAM 1 – PROCESS FOR MAKING A COMPLAINT

**Student has a complaint**

Yes

### 3.8 Confidentiality

No

**Understand the Complaints Process**

Access the Student Complaints website to understand the complaints process.

See Section.2.1 *Student Complaints Procedures*

**Step 3 Refer to the Student Ombudsman**

Refer the complaint to the Student Ombudsman within 10 working days of the date of notification of the outcome of step 2.

See Section 3.2.3 *Student Complaints Procedures* and Table 1 of the *Policy*

**Matter is resolved**

Student satisfied

**External Review**

Queensland Ombudsman

Student dissatisfied with handling of review of their complaint

Student satisfied

**Matter is resolved**

Student dissatisfied with handling of their complaint

**Step 2 Make a Complaint**

Using the *Student Complaints Form* make a complaint to the relevant University staff member listed in Table 1.

See Section 3.2.2 *Student Complaints Procedures* and Table 1 of the Policy

Student satisfied

**Matter is resolved**

Student dissatisfied

Student dissatisfied

Student satisfied

**Matter is resolved**

**Step 1 Resolve the Concern Informally**

A student should try to resolve the issue informally by approaching the person or service area concerned directly.

See Section.2.2.1 *Student Complaints Procedures*

All documentation relating to complaints will be kept confidential and shall be disclosed only to those persons who have a right to the information by virtue of their role in the complaints process, or as required by law.

### 3.9 Complaints Involving Allegations Concerning a Staff Member

Where a student complaint includes allegations concerning the conduct of a staff member, and the substance of those allegations may constitute misconduct or serious misconduct as defined in [Griffith University Academic Staff Enterprise Agreement](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Griffith%20University%20Academic%20Staff%20Enterprise%20Agreement%202017%20-%202021.pdf) and the [Griffith University Professional and Support Staff Enterprise Agreement](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Griffith%20University%20Professional%20and%20Support%20Staff%20Agreement%202017%20-%202021.pdf), the allegation shall be managed in accordance with the provisions in the relevant agreement. Where a student complaint includes allegations of bullying, harassment and discrimination by a staff member, these matters are to be dealt with under the University’s Staff Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy, Staff Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Policy and Reporting and Resolution of Staff Sexual Assault, Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Procedures.

### 3.10 Recordkeeping

In accordance with the University’s Information Management Policy, the Student Ombudsman maintains in a business system records of student complaints referred to the Student Ombudsman. These records are maintained to protect the rights and interests of all parties; explain and justify the actions of the University and its employees; and document and explain the decision-making of the University. The record will include information about the complaint, including: what occurred; when it occurred; how it occurred; the parties involved; and the outcome. These records form the data upon which the Student Ombudsman Annual Report to the Academic Committee on its activities is based.

### 3.11 Consultation and Feedback

The University, through the Student Ombudsman, will periodically seek feedback on satisfaction with complaint processes from complainants, persons and bodies involved in addressing student complaints. The information will be used only for quality review and improvement purposes.

### 3.12 Frivolous or Vexatious Complaints

The University may decline to take action in respect of a complaint that is assessed as frivolous or vexatious. A complaint is deemed to be frivolous or vexatious where the complaint is:

* without merit;
* the substance of the complaint has already been considered by the University and satisfactory measures have been taken to resolve the matter;
* dishonest or contains intentionally misleading information;
* pursued with undue persistence; or
* pursued in a manner that threatens, menaces or harasses a member of University staff or fellow student.

Complainants who engage in unreasonable behaviour in respect of making complaints may be dealt with in accordance with the University’s [Student Misconduct Policy](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Student%20Misconduct%20Policy.pdf).

### 3.13 Withdrawal of a Complaint

A request by a student to withdraw a complaint may be made in writing at any time during the complaints process to the relevant University staff member or the Student Ombudsman. Notwithstanding this, the University reserves the right to continue to investigate a complaint if required to do so to satisfy other requirements or protect its own interests.

### 3.14 Outcomes of Complaint

In making a complaint a student requests a review (among other matters) of their treatment by the University, the quality or delivery of a service provided by the University or the conduct of University staff or students for the purpose of:

* receiving an apology;
* correcting an error in relation to the student or the student’s record;
* having a decision made; and/or
* improving existing services and processes.

### 3.15 External Review

Where the student is dissatisfied with the University’s handling of their complaint, the student may lodge a complaint with the Queensland Ombudsman.

The complaints process within the University should be exhausted before a complaint is lodged with the Queensland Ombudsman.

## 4.0 Roles, responsibilities and delegations

Table 1 Responsible Officers for Handling Student Complaints

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **AREA OF COMPLAINT** | **STEP 1 Informal Resolution** | **STEP 2 Complaint to the relevant University Staff member** | **STEP 3 Refer to the Student Ombudsman** |
| Conduct of Staff | | | |
| Academic Staff | Course Convenor  Assistant Director of Studies GELI if the matter is specific to academic staff employed by GELI. | Head of School  Director, GELI | Student Ombudsman |
| General staff | Approach the person concerned directly. | Manager of Service Area | Student Ombudsman |
| Conduct of Students | | | |
| Individual or a Group of students other than HDR candidates | Approach the person or group concerned directly. | Program Director  Director, GELI if the matter is specific to students undertaking English language courses offered by GELI. | Student Ombudsman |
| Individual or a Group of HDR Candidates | Approach the person or group concerned directly. | HDR Convenor | Student Ombudsman |
| Student Society/Organisation | Approach the person or group concerned directly. | Associate Director, Campus Services General Manager, Student Guild | Student Ombudsman |
| Services | | | |
| **Campus services** including accommodation, Griffith University Residential Colleges, parking, sporting, food and retail facilities.  Parking and Security (including Security buses) | Approach a front-line representative of the service area concerned directly or use student feedback services and surveys. | Associate Director, Campus Services  Associate Director, Facilities Management | Student Ombudsman |
| **Transport Services**  Nathan/Mt Gravatt intercampus Bus  Gold Coast/Nathan intercampus Bus | Approach a front-line representative of the service area concerned directly or use student feedback services and surveys. | Fleet and Logistics Manager  General Manager, Student Guild | Student Ombudsman |
| **Information services** including library and learning resources, academic/learning/study support and IT services. | Approach a front-line representative of the service area concerned directly or use student feedback services and surveys. | Director, Library & Learning Services  Director, IT Services | Student Ombudsman |
| **Program, course and teaching quality** including professional accreditation, placements, assessment. | Approach the person concerned directly. | Program Director  Course Convenor  HDR Convenor  If the matter is specific to HDR programs and students.  Director, GELI  If the matter is specific to English language courses offered by GELI and GELI students. | Student Ombudsman |
| **Student Services** including:   * examinations, timetabling, graduations, and Student Administration/Centre Services * counselling, student equity and disability, welfare and student liaison   careers and employment, peer mentoring, tutoring support, scholarships. | Approach a front-line representative of the service area concerned directly or use student feedback services and surveys. | Director, Student Business Services  Director, Student Services  Director, Student Success Unit  Associate Director, International Administration (if the matter is specific to the student’s enrolment as an international student).  Director, GUMURRII SSU (if the matter is specific to the student’s enrolment as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student).  Director, Griffith Graduate Research School (if the matter is specific to the student’s enrolment as a HDR student).  Director, GELI (if the matter is specific to students undertaking English language courses offered by GELI | Student Ombudsman |

## 5.0 Definitions

**Business systems** refers to databases that store information relating to student complaints and the outcomes of decisions made in respect of student complaints or case management systems that track information leading to a decision in relation to a complaint, the reasons for a decision and a record of the decision or decision support applications that store policy or other information to guide decision-makers. This also includes feedback systems that store information received from students including but not limited to Student Experience surveys.

**Complainant** means a person making a complaint. To make a complaint in accordance with this policy the person must be a student as defined below.

**Complaint** refers to an expression of concern or dissatisfaction in relation to the treatment of a student, the quality or delivery of a service or the conduct of staff and students.

**Staff** refers to:

* Academic staff: a person employed by Griffith University in a position classified at Academic Level A, B, C, D or E or a person employed under a casual arrangement to carry out academic duties. This includes external examiners appointed for the purpose of examining research dissertations and HDR candidates.
* General staff: a person employed by Griffith University in a position classified as General Staff HEW level 1 to HEW level 10 Grade 1 inclusive and includes a person employed under a casual arrangement.

**Student** refers to a person who has an active enrolment status in a program of the University. To have an active enrolment status, the student shall have:

* accepted an offer of admission to a program and shall have completed the enrolment procedures prescribed by the University;
* paid such fees and charges as the University may require to be paid as a condition of enrolment;
* fulfilled the conditions prescribed for Commonwealth supported students, in the case of a student admitted to a program as a Commonwealth supported student; and
* completed any other procedures which may be required as a condition of enrolment.

In some instances a student undertaking a program classified as a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) may be referred to as an HDR candidate.

**Student Ombudsman** refers to a person who provides leadership in the handling of student complaints at the University. The Student Ombudsman considers complaints which arise from students. The Student Ombudsman investigates as far as possible whether the University has acted fairly and reasonably and ensures matters are dealt with in a consistent and procedurally fair manner.

**Vexatious** refers to a complaint which is:

* without merit;
* the substance of the complaint has already been considered by the University and satisfactory measures have been taken to resolve the matter;
* dishonest or contains intentionally misleading information;
* pursued with undue persistence; or
* pursued in a manner that harasses a member of University staff or fellow student.

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| **INFORMATION** | Printable version (PDF) Downloadable version (Word) |
| Title | Student Complaints Policy |
| Document number | 2023/0000347 |
| Purpose | This policy and the *Student Complaints Procedures* provide the mechanism for resolving complaints made by students about their treatment by the University, the quality of a service provided by the University or the conduct of University staff or students. |
| Audience | Staff; Students |
| Category | Academic |
| Subcategory | Student Services |
| Approval date | 11 March 2023 |
| Effective date | 27 February 2023 |
| Review date | 2024 |
| Policy advisor | Registrar |
| Approving authority | Academic Committee |

| **RELATED POLICY DOCUMENTS AND supporting documents** | |
| --- | --- |
| Legislation | N/A |
| Policy | [Student Review and Appeals Policy](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Student%20Review%20and%20Appeals%20Policy.pdf)  [Student Charter](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Student%20Charter.pdf)  [Student Administration Policy](https://sharepointpubstor.blob.core.windows.net/policylibrary-prod/Student%20Administration%20Policy.pdf)  [Code of Conduct](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf)  [Staff Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Staff%20Sexual%20Assault%20and%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Policy.pdf)  [Staff Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Policy](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Staff%20Harassment%20Bullying%20and%20Discrimination%20Policy.pdf)  [Public Interest Disclosure Policy](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Public%20Interest%20Disclosure%20Policy.pdf)  [Griffith University Privacy Plan](https://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/governance/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan)  [Information Management Policy](https://sharepointpubstor.blob.core.windows.net/policylibrary-prod/Information%20Management%20Policy.pdf) |
| Procedures | Student Complaints Procedure  [Reporting and Resolution of Staff Sexual Assault, Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Procedures](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Reporting%20and%20Resolution%20of%20Staff%20Sexual%20Assault%20Harassment%20Bullying%20and%20Discrimination%20Procedures.pdf)  [Student Review and Appeals Procedures](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Student%20Review%20and%20Appeals%20Procedures.pdf)  [Staff Guidelines for Decision-Making in Student Cases](https://policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Staff%20Guidelines%20on%20Decision-Making.pdf) |
| Local protocols | N/A |
| Forms | [Student Complaints Form](https://www.griffith.edu.au/students/student-complaints/student-complaints-form-intro)  [Queensland Ombudsman](https://www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au/) |