

# Student Complaints

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## 1.0 Purpose

Griffith University is committed to providing a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for all students, employees, and other individuals who are part of the University Community. Part of this commitment is providing a clear, accessible and supported way for students to raise Issues and make Complaints to the University.

Within that framework, these procedures provide the procedural implementation of the key principles in the University's *Student Complaints Policy*. They also support the operation of the *Student Conduct, Wellbeing and Safety Policy* and *Student Charter Framework*.

## 2.0 Scope

This Procedure applies to Complaints raised by students of the University in all career levels, modes of study and locations, physical or digital, participating in activities organised by or under the auspices of the University.

For the purpose of this procedure, the term "student" includes:

- all enrolled students and HDR candidates at the University; and
- students with Active Enrolment Status, including those who are not 'carrying load' and students on approved Leave of Absence, Deferment or between enrolment periods.

The Procedure is also applicable to:

- a person whose enrolment is suspended or cancelled by the University, and who does not have access to an appeals process, who may access this process to raise a Complaint about the decision to suspend or cancel their enrolment
- a former student whose enrolment ended not more than six (6) months previously, who may access this process to complain about a matter that occurred during their time as a student.

Complaints can be made about:

- a. an administrative error or an administrative decision that is not addressed through the Review and Appeals Policy
- b. a problem or Issue raised by a student regarding their treatment as a student
- c. the quality or delivery of a service or advice provided by the University
- d. the conduct of employees, other students, or other members of the University community, including behaviour that may amount to misconduct under the relevant student or employee policy and procedure.

Disclosures and formal reports of matters that constitute serious misconduct such as bullying, discrimination, harassment and sexual harm are managed under the *Student Reports of Bullying Harassment Discrimination and Sexual Harm Procedure*.

Complaints made by non-students of the University are directed to the University's **Complaints and Grievances** web page. This includes former students who no longer have an active student account.

## 3.0 Procedure

### 3.1 Understanding the Complaints process

1. The student Complaints process is relevant when a student is seeking:
  - a. an apology
  - b. correction of an error in information the University holds about the student or the student's record
  - c. a change in conduct by others
  - d. a change in circumstances associated with their studies, including supports or accommodations they require
  - e. reconsideration of fees and charges
  - f. improvement of existing services and processes
  - g. management of an actual or perceived risk, such as being provided with a safety plan or support services.
2. Complaints must be lodged with the University within 12 months of the event that is the subject of the Complaint.
3. Where several students have the same concern, they may act as a group in making a Complaint, provided that each student is seeking the same outcome and has consented to be included in the Complaint.

### 3.2 Complaints process: Overview

1. Complaints at Griffith University are managed using a three-step process:
  - a. **Step 1: Self-guided resolution**  
Students are encouraged, where reasonable and appropriate, to try to resolve their Issue informally with the relevant person or area.
  - b. **Step 2: Formal Complaint**  
A student who is unable to resolve an Issue themselves can lodge a Formal Complaint to the University. The Decision-maker will engage in the most appropriate process for addressing the Formal Complaint, which may include investigation, facilitated discussions, internal rectification of errors, or referral to another University process (e.g. misconduct). Formal Complaints are received and facilitated via a University-wide lodgement and triage process managed by the Registrar's Office.
  - c. **Step 3: Referral to Griffith Student Ombudsman**  
A student who is dissatisfied with a Step 2 Formal Complaint decision can request a referral to the Griffith Student Ombudsman. The Griffith Student Ombudsman re-examines the Complaint process and decision and investigates as far as possible whether the University has acted fairly and reasonably. The Griffith Student Ombudsman then recommends action that will assist in the resolution of the Formal Complaint.
2. **Student support services and advocates** can provide assistance and information to students before, during and after the Complaints process.

### 3.3 Step 1: Self-guided resolution

1. Before lodging a Formal Complaint, students are expected to attempt to resolve matters in good faith themselves, where it is reasonable and appropriate to do so.
2. Students are encouraged to identify their Issue, think of some solutions and then use an appropriate strategy to address this Issue. The student can undertake self-guided resolution themselves, or in conjunction with an advocate, support service or person and may include:
  - a. speaking directly with the staff member or student responsible for the particular Issue
  - b. writing to the individual detailing concerns and requesting the alleged behaviour to stop
  - c. requesting a relevant staff member or an appropriate student representative organisation to raise the matter with the individual on their behalf or
  - d. providing qualitative feedback on improving service delivery using existing student feedback systems on the University's website or Student Experience of Teaching (SET) and Student Experience of a Course (SEC) surveys.
3. When a staff member becomes aware of a student Issue, they should:
  - a. if appropriate, endeavour to resolve the Issue to the satisfaction of all parties if possible and email the student the outcome and basis for that decision
  - b. refer the Issue to a Senior Officer if appropriate
  - c. redirect the student to the Report a Concern process if the matter involves bullying, discrimination, harassment or sexual harm or
  - d. where the matter is not suitable for self-guided resolution, or where parties consider that a matter may be serious and/or complex, encourage the student to lodge a Formal Complaint.
4. Students may also raise their Issues with an appropriate person within the relevant area. In attempting to resolve a student Issue at the local level, the staff member may employ a range of strategies, including but not limited to:
  - a. preliminary enquiries and seeking advice if required
  - b. problem-solving and remedial intervention
  - c. changing a decision within the scope of their authority
  - d. referral to other staff or support services, such as Student Counselling and Wellbeing or Student Safety and Wellbeing
  - e. facilitated discussions between parties
  - f. referring the complainant to the formal Complaints process.
5. If self-guided resolution proves unsuccessful or is not suitable to be attempted, the matter can be lodged as a Formal Complaint.

### 3.4 Step 2: Formal Complaint

1. If a student is unable to resolve an Issue at Step 1, they may make a Formal Complaint using the online **Student Complaint** form. Another individual may lodge a Formal Complaint on behalf of the student at their request.
2. Students may choose to make a Complaint anonymously using the online **Student Complaint** form. While the University treats all Formal Complaints seriously, it may or may not be able to fully investigate or take action to resolve the Issue when the source of the Complaint is unknown. In certain circumstances, the University may not be able to guarantee the ongoing anonymity of the complainant if the seriousness of the Complaint requires action.

3. When making a Formal Complaint, students should:
  - a. describe the nature of their Complaint, with as much detail as is practical
  - b. identify the relevant breach in University policy and procedure if relevant
  - c. describe any attempts to resolve the matter or the reasons for not attempting self-guided resolution
  - d. propose the outcome sought (students should be aware that not all formal Complaints will result in the outcome they seek).
4. The process of addressing the Complaint will begin within 10 business days of receipt of the written Complaint by the University.

#### **3.4.1 Formal Complaint preliminary assessment and triage**

1. When a Complaint is lodged, the Registrar's Office performs a preliminary assessment and triage. This involves:
  - a. prioritising Complaints for action
  - b. determining the nature and substance of the Complaint
  - c. assessing whether the Complaint is of a serious nature
  - d. assessing whether the Complaint is frivolous or has no substance
  - e. where possible, ensuring that the Complaint does not duplicate or substantially overlap with any legal action underway on the same matter
  - f. determining the correct referral point for Complaint resolution.
2. In assessing the Complaint, the Registrar's Office may:
  - a. contact the student and any other party/parties to a Complaint in order to gather information
  - b. if appropriate, contact the student to propose that self-guided resolution be attempted (if it has not been)
  - c. seek to clarify the information relevant to the matter
  - d. provide further information on the Complaint process and next steps to the student
  - e. provide relevant information arising from the Complaint as feedback to the relevant area
  - f. refer the matter to a different University process or service where appropriate (e.g. Report a Concern, Health, Counselling and Wellbeing, review and appeals, misconduct, etc.)

#### **3.4.2 Formal Complaint management**

1. Student Complaints will be referred to the relevant area as detailed in section 3.6 (Student Complaints Decision-makers).
2. Academic and professional staff handle student Complaints:
  - a. with due regard to timeframes and relevant deadlines (e.g. due date for responding to formal Complaints, census date, cut off to withdraw without academic penalty, cut off to meet graduation eligibility criteria, etc)
  - b. about those matters for which their role (e.g. Program Director) or their position (e.g. Director, Student and Academic Services) is designated in section 3.6 (Student Complaints Decision-makers)
  - c. in accordance with conditions, criteria and timeframes specified within this procedure

- d. on the basis of documentation specified in the University's policies, processes, websites and business systems, including the Programs and Courses website, Course Profiles, Learning@Griffith
- e. through identification of the key issues and relevant considerations
- f. in a manner that is reasonable, fair and impartial, including evaluating all relevant facts, disclosing any conflicts of interest and maintaining the student's privacy and the confidentiality of the matter
- g. adhering to requirements for full and accurate record keeping.

### 3.4.3 Complaint investigations

1. In Formal Complaints which involve more complex fact-finding, an investigation process may be used.
2. If the Decision-maker, in consultation with the Registrar's Office, considers that it is appropriate, an internal or external person may be appointed to conduct the investigation where specialist investigation skills and/or training are required.
3. The investigator will:
  - a. conduct the investigation with due regard to procedural fairness, timeliness, and the individuals' safety and wellbeing
  - b. notify the parties of the investigation
  - c. seek sufficient particulars to enable the Complaint to be investigated
  - d. interview the parties and, where necessary, any witnesses
  - e. review any relevant documentation
  - f. if the investigator is not the Decision-maker, prepare a report setting out the Complaint, how the investigation was conducted, relevant facts, and findings, and present this to the relevant Decision-maker.

### 3.4.4 Complaints outcomes

1. Formal Complaints can result in a number of outcomes, including:
  - a. correcting an error in relation to the student or the student's record
  - b. determining that the Complaint should be referred to another process, such as the student misconduct or review and appeals process
  - c. making a decision that may or may not be in the student's favour
  - d. rejecting the Complaint as unsubstantiated, trivial or vexatious
  - e. making a commitment to review and improve existing services and processes
  - f. issuing an apology to the student.
2. Students who are not satisfied with the proposed outcome of their Complaint may choose to refer the matter to the Griffith Student Ombudsman using the Griffith **Student Ombudsman Referral** form. Referrals to the Griffith Student Ombudsman must be lodged within 10 working days of the date of notification of the outcome of the Complaint.

Please note that the Griffith Student Ombudsman cannot consider matters managed under the student or employee misconduct process or decisions made under the *Student Review and Appeals Policy*.

### 3.5 Referral to Griffith Student Ombudsman

1. If a student refers a Complaint to the Griffith Student Ombudsman, the Ombudsman may:
  - a. uphold the Step 2 outcome without amendment
  - b. recommend other action to assist with the resolution of the Complaint
  - c. recommend actions and improvements to the responsible officer of the University Executive to address systemic issues arising from the consideration of a Complaint or Complaints.
2. The Griffith Student Ombudsman is the final step within the University's Complaints process. Students seeking further consideration of their Complaint are to be directed to the Queensland Ombudsman.

### 3.6 Student Complaints Decision-makers

1. The table below shows the roles that have responsibility for student complaints and the authority to propose resolutions.

TYPE OF COMPLAINT	STEP 1: SELF-GUIDED RESOLUTION	STEP 2: FORMAL COMPLAINT DECISION-MAKER
<b>CONDUCT</b>		
Potential serious misconduct (including cases of bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual harm)	Self-guided resolution is not recommended	Refer to the relevant misconduct process
Conduct of academic staff (excluding cases of bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual harm which are dealt with under the relevant misconduct process)	Course Convenor or HDR Convenor Assistant Director of Studies GELI (if the matter is specific to academic staff employed by GELI)	Head of School  Director, GELI
Conduct of professional staff (excluding cases of bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual harm)	Approach the person concerned directly.	Manager of Service Area
Conduct of another student: Coursework Student (excluding cases of bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual harm)	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)

TYPE OF COMPLAINT	STEP 1: SELF-GUIDED RESOLUTION	STEP 2: FORMAL COMPLAINT DECISION-MAKER
Conduct of another student: HDR Candidate (excluding cases of bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual harm)	Approach the person or group concerned directly	HDR Convenor
Student Society/Organisation	Approach the person or group concerned directly	Associate Director, Campus Services General Manager, Student Guild
<b>SERVICE RELATED</b>		
Campus services including accommodation, Griffith University Residential Colleges, 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
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
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 and Learning Services Chief Digital Officer
Student Services including examinations, timetabling, graduations, student centres, health, counselling and wellbeing, accessibility and disability, careers and employment, peer mentoring and scholarships.	Approach a front-line representative of the service area concerned directly or use student feedback services and surveys	Director, Student and Academic Services, or nominee Director, Student Engagement and Success, or nominee Director, Student Wellbeing and Accessibility, or nominee Deputy Director, Griffith International (if the matter is

TYPE OF COMPLAINT	STEP 1: SELF-GUIDED RESOLUTION	STEP 2: FORMAL COMPLAINT DECISION-MAKER
		<p>specific to the student's enrolment as an international student).</p> <p>Director, GELI (if the matter is specific to students undertaking English language courses offered by GELI)</p> <p>Director, Student Equity and Diversity (if the matter is specific to the student's enrolment as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student).</p> <p>Dean, Griffith Graduate Research School (if the matter is specific to the student's enrolment as a HDR student).</p>

### ACADEMIC RELATED

Program, course and teaching quality including professional accreditation, placements and assessment.	Approach the person concerned directly.	<p>Program Director</p> <p>Course Convenor</p> <p>HDR Convenor (if the matter is specific to HDR programs and students)</p> <p>Director, GELI (if the matter is specific to students undertaking English language courses offered by GELI)</p>
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### 3.7 Timeframes

ACTION	TIMEFRAME
<b>STEP 2: FORMAL COMPLAINTS</b>	
The University acknowledges receipt of the form and advises the student of actions to be taken and the expected resolution timeframe.	Within 24 hours of lodgement of the Student Complaints form.

## ACTION

## TIMEFRAME

The Complaint is referred to the Step 2: Formal Complaint Decision-maker, and the investigation is commenced.

Within 10 business days of lodgement of the Student Complaints form.

If the matter involves serious misconduct, it must be referred to relevant process within 3 business days.

The Decision-maker provides written advice to the student on the outcome of the Complaint, with reasons.

Within 20 business days of lodgement of the Student Complaints form.

Advice must be included on the student's right to refer the matter to the Griffith Student Ombudsman, including the timeframe to do so, if the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of their Complaint.

## STEP 3: GRIFFITH STUDENT OMBUDSMAN

The student lodges a Griffith Student Ombudsman Referral form.

Within 10 business days of the student receiving the outcome of their Complaint.

The Griffith Student Ombudsman acknowledges receipt of the Complaint, advising of the actions to be taken and the timeframe for the process to review the outcome of the student's Complaint.

Within 24 hours of lodgement of the Student Ombudsman Referral form.

The Griffith Student Ombudsman commences a review of all relevant material and any investigations that may be required.

Within 10 business days of lodgement of the Student Ombudsman Referral form.

The Griffith Student Ombudsman provides written advice to the student on the outcome of their review of the Complaint.

Within 20 business days of lodgement of the Student Ombudsman Referral form.

The Griffith Student Ombudsman advises the student of their rights to make a Complaint about the University's handling of the Complaint and/or the Complaint outcome to the Queensland Ombudsman.

## 4.0 Definitions

For the purposes of this procedure, the following definitions apply:

**Bullying** is repeated, unreasonable behaviour by an individual or group, directed towards an individual or group, either physical or psychological in nature, that intimidates, offends, degrades, humiliates, undermines or threatens.

**Complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction requiring formal resolution.

**Consent**, in the context of making a Complaint, is where an individual is not pressured and freely agrees to make the Complaint.

**Coursework Students** are those enrolled at the University in a program of teaching and learning that leads to the acquisition of skills and knowledge and does not include a major research component. Bachelor's programs and postgraduate coursework programs are all coursework programs.

**Decision-maker** is a person authorised to make a decision.

**Discrimination** can be either direct or indirect. Direct Discrimination occurs when someone is treated unfavourably because they have one or more protected attributes. Indirect Discrimination is when someone is disadvantaged by an unreasonable requirement, condition or practice because of a protected attribute. Protected personal attributes cover:

- age
- breastfeeding
- employment activity
- gender identity
- disability
- industrial activity
- lawful sexual activity
- marital status or relationship status
- parental status or status as a carer
- physical features
- political belief or activity
- pregnancy
- race
- religious belief or activity
- sex
- sexual orientation
- an expunged homosexual conviction
- intersex status
- personal association whether as a relative or otherwise) with a person who is identified by reference to any of the above attributes.

**Frivolous Complaint** may be one that:

- is trivial in nature or
- has no serious purpose or value or
- is sufficiently meritless that further action would be a waste of time or cost or
- the extent of the Complaint is out of proportion to the significance of the matter.

**General Misconduct** means conduct that:

- breaches expectations outlined in the Student Conduct, Safety and Wellbeing Policy that are not related to Academic or Research Misconduct or
- impairs the reasonable freedom of others to pursue their studies, research, duties and other lawful activities in the University or
- amounts to improper access to and use of University facilities or access to, collection and use of information or improper use of the property of others in relation to University activities.

The Student General Conduct Procedure and Resolution of Breaches of Residential Community Standards and other Grievances within the Griffith University Residential Colleges Policy detail further examples of General Misconduct.

Misconduct of a sexual nature is conduct that breaches the expectations outlined in the Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Policy.

**Issue** is an expression of dissatisfaction by a student that can be resolved directly with the person or area involved without the need for formal action.

**Harassment** is behaviour or conduct that is unwelcome and unsolicited, and that makes an individual feel offended, intimidated, or humiliated. Harassment may be sexual or non-sexual in nature. Harassment may

take multiple forms and have a variety of motivations. It can be a single incident, a series of incidents or an ongoing pattern of behaviour and can be perpetrated by individuals or groups of people.

**Higher Degree by Research (HDR)** refers to a Research Masters or Research Doctorate where:

- Research Masters means a Level 9 qualification as described in the AQF and where a minimum of two-thirds of the program of learning is for research, research training and independent study.
- Research Doctorate means a Level 10 qualification as described in the AQF and where a minimum of two years of the program of learning, and typically two-thirds of the qualification, is research.

**Sexual Harm** is any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature. Sexual Harm includes Sexual Assault, rape, Sexual Harassment, sex-based harassment, and any other unwanted sexual behaviour, whether online or in person. The harm may result in a person feeling uncomfortable, frightened, distressed, intimidated, or harmed either physically or psychologically.

**University Activities** means:

- using University equipment or resources (e.g. communication technologies, vehicles, facilities)
- using private communication methods to support or engage with University activities (e.g. setting up a Facebook group for students studying a particular unit to discuss their studies)
- being in attendance at a University event, function or activity
- participating in any activity as a representative or Student of the University (e.g. field trips, practicums, conferences, sporting trips, participation in a University affiliated club, community meetings etc.)
- carrying out functions in connection with a University-endorsed activity, including at places external to University premises (e.g. at licensed premises, private residence, in the street)
- activities outside of the University where there is a significant or substantial connection to the employment at the University
- other special circumstances relating to educational institutions, including participating in any activity or carrying out functions in connection with their position at the University where they come into contact with Staff, students or other parties of a separate educational institution.

### **University Community**

University community includes:

- enrolled students, including cross-institutional students and students on exchange from another institution
- employees and exchange employees
- employees of controlled entities, Centres and Institutes, and affiliated clubs and associations
- contractors and consultants performing work on University sites or on behalf of the University
- the Council and its committees
- any volunteer in the workplace and study environment
- clinical title holders, adjunct, visiting, honorary and conjoint appointees of the University.

**University Premises** means any University-owned, operated or occupied property or facility, unless operated by a third party provider which has its own policies that satisfactorily cover Sexual Harm prevention and response.

**Vexatious Complaint** is one that is falsely made in bad faith and without evidence.

## **5.0 Information**

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Title	Student Complaints Procedure
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Document number	2024/0000064
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Purpose	This Procedure details the processes for managing disclosures and allegations of Bullying, harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Harm by University students.
Audience	Students
Category	Academic
Subcategory	Student Services
UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	This document aligns with Sustainable Development Goal/s: 3: Good Health and Well-Being
Approval date	9 August 2024
Effective date	9 August 2024
Review date	2029
Policy advisor	Registrar
Approving authority	Vice Chancellor

## 6.0 Related Policy Documents and Supporting Documents

Legislation	<a href="#">Higher Education Support Act 2003</a> <a href="#">Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021</a> <a href="#">Education Services for Overseas Student (ESOS) Act 2000</a>
Policy	<a href="#">Student Charter Framework</a> <a href="#">Sexual Harm Prevention and Response Policy</a> <a href="#">Student Conduct, Safety and Wellbeing Policy</a> <a href="#">Student Review and Appeal Policy</a>
Procedure	<a href="#">Student General Conduct Procedure</a> <a href="#">Student Reports of Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Harm Procedure</a>

## Student Review and Appeals Procedure

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### Local Protocol

[Complaints and Grievances web page](#)  
[Student Complaints web page](#)

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### Forms

[Report a Concern form](#)  
[Report a Concern \(anonymous disclosure or report\) form](#)  
[Student Complaints form](#)  
[Student Ombudsman Referral form](#)

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