

MPLS Division

Guidance for Students on making a complaint and academic appeals

This document sets out what students should do if they want to raise a complaint or make an academic appeal, and who the best person to approach would be. The University's [academic appeals and complaints procedure](#) is designed to ensure that complaints are properly investigated and are given careful and fair consideration. This document supplements the institutional policy by setting out the approach taken within MPLS for local resolution at departmental level.

Definitions

- A **complaint** can be made in relation to:
 - University administrative and support services (including departmental facilities and central facilities such as libraries, counselling, etc.)
 - University academic services and support (departmental teaching, supervision etc.)
- An **academic appeal** is an appeal against the decision of an academic body in terms of whether the procedures were followed properly, errors were made, or the process was biased in some way.

For the remainder of this document, it is assumed that a complaint is being raised. The process for academic appeals is similar, although the timeframes are different. See University guidance on [academic appeals](#) for more information.

Process:

When raising concerns to the University please ensure that you have read the [complaints procedure](#) carefully. The University aims to resolve straightforward complaints as quickly as possible using local resolution. The University Student Complaint procedure is divided into three parts:

Stage 1 is a local resolution managed where the complaint has arisen

Stage 2 is consideration by one of the University Proctors

Stage 3 is a review of the Proctor's decision by a Review panel member.

Each stage must be completed before you can move on to the next stage. Both stage 2 and stage 3 are managed by the Proctors' Office.

Stage 1: Local (Departmental) Resolution

1. Where appropriate, often the simplest way to achieve a satisfactory resolution is to have an informal discussion with the person immediately responsible for the issue that you wish to complain about. If you do not feel comfortable raising the matter with this person then you should speak or write to the relevant person below.

I. Who to contact to raise a concern/complaint:

If your concern or complaint relates to:

- a) **teaching, supervision or other provision made by the department**, then you should raise it with Director of Teaching ([Joe Pitt-Francis](#)), the Director of Graduate Studies ([Jon Barrett](#)), or the Director of Professional Programmes ([Jeremy Gibbons](#)) as appropriate.
- b) **departmental facilities** it should be made to the Head of Administration and Finance ([Sophie Gibbons](#)).
- c) **For undergraduate joint courses (joint honours schools or courses taught across more than one department/faculty)**: If your concern relates to the course as a whole, rather than to teaching or other provision made by one of the faculties/departments, you should raise it with the Director of Teaching ([Standa Živný](#)).
- d) **general areas of concern about provision affecting students as a whole** should be raised through Joint Consultative Committees or via student representation on the department's committees.

- e) **teaching or other provision made by your college**, you should raise it either with your tutor or with one of the college officers, Senior Tutor, Tutor for Graduates (as appropriate). Your college will also be able to explain how to take your complaint further if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of its consideration.
- 2. If you feel unable to approach one of those individuals, for example, if your complaint is against the person who would be the normal contact, you may contact the Head of Department ([Leslie Goldberg](#)). If you are unsure who would be the best person to contact about your complaint, you should contact the Head of Administration and Finance ([Sophie Gibbons](#)) who will be able to advise you.
- 3. The person dealing with the complaint will attempt to resolve your concern/complaint informally or refer to another member of staff who is better placed to deal with it. If they refer it to another member of staff you will be informed of the person who is dealing with the complaint.
- 4. If the designated person who would normally handle the complaint is on annual leave for a long period or on sick leave, please contact the Head of Academic Administration (or equivalent) ([Rachel Breward](#)) in the department for advice on who the complaint should be referred to.

Complaint Confidentiality:

- 5. Your complaint will be handled confidentially. This means that people should not be told about your complaint unless there is a good reason, such as those who need to be told for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint or academic appeal. No third party should be told any more about the investigation than is strictly necessary.
- 6. Confidentiality does not imply anonymity. It will usually be the case that the department will need to disclose information to others, including the person (or persons) who are the subject of the complaint. This is likely to include informing them of your identity as the person who made the complaint.
- 7. You should be informed by the person dealing with the complaint who will be told about your complaint. You are entitled to object to information being shared with certain people, but should be aware that this may limit what action the department can take. E.g. it is not usually possible for a department to take a complaint forwards without giving the person who is the subject of the complaint an opportunity to respond to any allegations made against them.
- 8. Anonymous complaints will only be considered in very exceptional cases, where there is a compelling reason to do so. Raising a concern anonymously might impede the investigation and communication of the outcome.
- 9. All parties involved in a Complaint are required to act reasonably and fairly towards each other and to respect the University's procedures. No one investigating a Complaint should have any conflict of interest in the matter.

II. When to raise your complaint:

- 10. Complaints should normally be raised as soon as possible and no later than three months of the matter arising. It is acknowledged that in some cases there is not always a clear point at which the matter arose, e.g. where a complaint is being made about supervision over a period of time. However, it is still important that complaints are made as soon as possible, as this gives the maximum opportunity for a satisfactory resolution to be reached.
- 11. For academic appeals these should be made within five working days of when you were notified of the academic decision which you are appealing.
- 12. It is important to remember that there is a time limit of three months for a complaint to be referred to the [Proctors](#) for consideration.
 - a) If a complaint is raised very close to the three month time limit and there will not be sufficient opportunity for the department to investigate, the department will notify the Proctors' Office of the complaint and seek advice on how to proceed.

13. A complaint that is raised outside of the three month time limit will be 'out of time' for consideration, and will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, e.g. where you are able to demonstrate clearly that you were unable to make the complaint sooner and within the three month time frame.
14. If there has been some delay with your complaint being investigated you are entitled to refer your complaint to the Head of Department. If the Head of Department is the person already dealing with your complaint please contact the Division for advice (graduate.studies@mpls.ox.ac.uk).

III. Timescales and investigation steps

15. Once you have raised your complaint an acknowledgement will be sent to you as soon as possible and within five working days. The acknowledgement will include information on who will be dealing with the complaint and, if possible, provide an indication of preliminary steps and timeframe.
16. Your department should keep a written record of the complaint, but you are advised to keep your own records and to keep a copy of any written information sent to you at every stage of the process.
 - a) If the complaint has been made in writing, the department will clarify any ambiguities in the written complaint with you. It may be appropriate to conduct an initial meeting with you so that all parties are clear what the complaint is about.
 - b) If the complaint has been made orally, the department will summarise the complaint in writing and will send it to you as soon as possible with a request to clarify anything they may have misunderstood.
 - c) If there are any inconsistencies or points that you do not agree with in any written communication you should note this in writing to the person dealing with the complaint as soon as possible.
17. If any meetings are scheduled to discuss the matter you are entitled to be accompanied by someone, e.g. a friend, your college advisor. You should notify the department of anyone who is going to accompany you and their relationship to you.
18. You will be contacted within ten working days of the complaint being made to update you on progress. The information will explain:
 - a) Who is investigating the complaint and why this person is dealing with the complaint, e.g. they are the person responsible for dealing with student complaints of this type.
 - b) What the department is going to do to investigate the complaint.
 - c) How long it is expected to take, including when you should expect the next update.
19. The department will investigate the complaint, and gather any relevant information/evidence.
 - a) You may be asked to provide evidence to substantiate the issues raised, where possible. The department will set out the types of evidence that may be required. This may include independent medical evidence, reports by professionals, financial information or witness statements, etc.
 - b) The department will also gather any other relevant evidence from formal records, e.g. eVision, GSR, published information.
 - c) The department may ask other parties to the complaint to give their perspective. However, before doing so, the department will inform you who is going to be made aware of the complaint prior to any information being disclosed. This may be in writing or meeting in person. If meeting in person, they will keep a record of what was said for the purpose of the investigation.
 - i) If you object to information being disclosed to someone who is required for the complaint to proceed, the department may not be able to continue investigating the complaint or it may limit the action that can be taken (see complaint confidentiality section above).
 - ii) All concerns raised are taken seriously and any information provided by yourself and other parties will be treated fairly.
 - iii) Where other parties' accounts have been provided these may conflict with what you have presented but will also be taken seriously and given consideration.

20. Once all investigations have been completed you will be written to setting out how the issue has been considered or how it will be resolved.
21. If you feel that your concerns have not been resolved, you can take the matter to the Proctors' under [stage 2](#) of the University Student Complaints Procedure. As part of this complaint you will need to show what steps you have taken to try and resolve your complaint at a locally level, and include any relevant evidence/documentation.

IV. Sources of Advice and Guidance:

22. Many sources of advice are available from colleges, departments and bodies like the Counselling Service or the Oxford SU Student Advice Service, which have extensive experience in advising students. You may wish to take advice from any of these sources before pursuing your complaint.

<p>Within the Department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor • Director of Graduate Studies • Head of Department • Graduate Office • Academic Administration • Harassment Officers • Disability Coordinator 	<p>Within your College:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Tutor • College Advisor • Tutor for Graduate Studies • College Doctor • Chaplain • Dean 	<p>Across the University:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Counselling Service http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling • Oxford University Student Union Student Advice Service https://www.oxfordsu.org/support/studentadvice/ • Nightline http://oxfordnightline.org/ • University Harassment Advisor network https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/harassment • Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/supportservice?wssl=1 • Student Resolution Service https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/student-resolution-service?wssl=1 • Equality and Diversity Office http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop
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