

**Student Complaint Procedures**

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## 1.0 Purpose

These procedures intend to provide a clear pathway to resolve complaints quickly, efficiently, and locally. They will support students and staff when a student complains about an element of their experience at DCU. Dublin City University (DCU) commits to providing students with a positive and excellent university experience and a professional standard of service.

To achieve this, DCU staff aspire to a high level of professionalism, competency, and fairness that includes the following[[1]](#footnote-1).

1. taking responsibility for actions
2. acting fairly and proportionately
3. dealing with errors effectively
4. seeking continuous improvement
5. being open and accountable.

The University expects most complaints to be dealt with locally to a satisfactory resolution. If a student cannot find a resolution informally or where they feel that they cannot raise the complaint at the local level, a student can make a formal complaint to the Director of Service/Unit or Dean. Beyond DCU, the [Office of The Ombudsman](https://www.ombudsman.ie/) and the [Office of the Ombudsman for Children](https://www.oco.ie/complaints/) is an independent office that investigates complaints. The Ombudsman, where appropriate, may make recommendations concerning the administrative actions of the University.

## 2.0 Guidance for Handling a Complaint

### 2.1 Principles of Handling a Complaint

Issues raised by a student under this policy will be in accordance with the general principles of natural justice and fair procedures. These principles include the following[[2]](#footnote-2).

**Accessible:**

Complaint procedures will be accessible to all students, using the principles of Universal Design, communicated clearly and available in person and online.

**Frontline Resolution:**

When a complainant makes initial contact, the staff member will endeavour to establish the details of the complaint. Frontline resolution is preferred to minimise the number of times a student needs to communicate their complaint.

**Investigation**:

* Staff will conduct the investigation as confidentially as possible to protect those involved. Staff will maintain confidentiality provided this does not compromise the resolution process.
* The investigation will be evidence-based.
* Students will have a single point of contact throughout the investigation.
* Staff members involved in the complaint will not be involved in the investigation.
* The complaint will be acknowledged within **5 working days**.

**Recording the Complaint:**

* Complaints should be stored securely within a suitable filing system in accordance with GDPR for 2 years.
* The Ombudsman/Ombudsman for Children may require complaint files in the future. Requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 or Data Protection Act 2018 may also be made in the future.
* Staff should note on file full details of any complaint and investigation. Details can include action taken, the outcome of any investigation, response to the complainant and redress offered.

**Response**:

* Students have the right to a fair and impartial determination of the issues concerned, considering any relevant or appropriate evidence, factors, or circumstances.
* Any staff member named in a complaint will be provided with the details of the complaint and allowed to respond.
* Staff will communicate the outcome formally and will include any further advice required such as details of the Ombudsman or other appropriate escalation point.

**Redress:**

* Several redress options could be offered such as an apology, an explanation, improving the quality of a service or correcting an error.

No member of the university community named in a complaint procedure should suffer any unnecessary penalty for being involved in a complaint procedure. Staff named in a complaint can seek support from HR via the relevant business partner or through the [DCU Employee Assistance Programme](https://www.dcu.ie/hr/dcu-employee-assistance-service-eas).

### 2.2 Seeking support prior to making a complaint

A student support professional can provide support to a student prior to them making a complaint. A student support professional can include [DCU Student Advisers](https://www.dcu.ie/sal), [DCU Chaplains](https://www.dcu.ie/chaplaincy), [Student Support Officer](https://www.dcu.ie/students)s, or the Student Policy Officer.

Support can include providing information on how to make a complaint, providing a copy of the policy, procedures, and relevant administrative forms. Additionally, they can help identify if a complaint can be made within the scope of the Student Complaints Policy and/or another relevant student policy and identify the correct DCU staff member to address the complaint.

### 2.3 Timelines

Every effort will be made to adhere to the time limits prescribed in the procedure. The time limits laid down under the Formal Procedure can be extended only by mutual agreement of the parties concerned.

* To enable prompt resolution, complaints should be raised as soon as problems arise. The University expects that concerns will normally be raised within **20 working days**, starting from when the complainant first became aware of the problem.
* The University will respond to and deal with complaints as quickly as possible. At the local level, Heads of Units should ensure that their staff acknowledge and respond to complaints promptly.
* It is expected that staff will resolve complaints within **10 working days** of receipt of the complaint at local level, and within **30 working days** of receipt of complaint for review by the Director of Unit/Dean.

## 3.0 Procedures

### 3.1 Stage 1 - Raising a Complaint

In Stage 1, a student approaches the relevant staff member, Unit, Faculty or School directly to communicate a complaint. Where a complaint arises, a mutually acceptable solution should be sought at a local level and through informal means. This can be done by email, by letter, by phone or in person. In many cases, complaints can be resolved on an informal basis without escalating to Stage 2 and 3. ***Stage 1 Complaints*** should be acknowledged within **5 working days** and resolved within **10 working days**. For details on who to contact within a Unit, School, or Faculty, go to [Appendix 1](#_heading=h.om96k84z0b49). As DCU supports a culture of dignity and respect, students and staff are expected to treat each other with respect when dealing with a complaint. Students need to be respectful of the process and allow staff to deal with complaints within the timeframe of the procedures. Persistent, aggressive, or inappropriate behaviour may result in the [Student Code of Conduct and Discipline](https://www.dcu.ie/ocoo/disciplinary-committee) being invoked.

### 3.2 Guidelines for Student Submitting a Complaint

* Ask a staff member in the Faculty, School, or Unit how you can make a complaint.
* If the complaint is regarding a member of staff, speak to the person directly. If this is not possible, contact the Chairperson of Programme, Head of School, or Unit.
* If the complaint is related to a process, policy or procedure not being followed, contact the relevant member of staff in the area (go to [Appendix 1](#_heading=h.om96k84z0b49)).
* Be very clear in describing what you think has gone wrong – stick to the facts.
* Tell the Unit/School what you would like them to do to correct the situation.
* Provide supporting documents and evidence to support your complaint if appropriate.
* Do not make offensive remarks about the people you have been dealing with.
* Ask for help to make your complaint if you require it by contacting the [Student Advice and Learning Skills Centre](https://www.dcu.ie/advice).

### 3.3 Guidelines for Staff Handling a Complaint

To assist in dealing with a complaint impartially, fairly, openly and appropriately, read the [Ombudsman’s Guide to Standards of Best Practice for Public Servants](https://www.ombudsman.ie/guidance-for-service-providers/guide-to-standards-of-bes/Guide-to-Standards-of-Best-Practice-for-Public-Servants.pdf).

* Ask the student to submit as much detail as possible to get a clear understanding of the complaint.
* Listen carefully and sensitively and ensure the student feels heard.
* Give clear information on the expected timeline of next steps to manage expectations.
* Understand the Student Complaint Policy and accompanying procedures and what steps to take.
* Liaise with your line manager on how to resolve the complaint or if escalation is required.

### 3.4 Stage 2 - Escalation to Head of Unit/School

Where a complaint has been unable to achieve a suitable resolution or a complainant is not happy with the outcome of a Stage 1 complaint, the complaint may be escalated to Stage 2. Commencement of Stage 2 begins with the submission of a **Student Complaint Form** by the complainant with all relevant supporting documents supplied to the Head of School or Unit. Information provided can include evidence of any effort to resolve the complaint at a local level and informally. Acknowledgement of the complaint should be within **10 working days**. An initial discussion will be held with the complainant to discuss the details of the complaint. This can be done over the phone or in person. It may be required to seek assistance or further background information from a Unit, School, or Faculty colleague to resolve a complaint. Time should be allowed for a comprehensive investigation and suitable resolution. If a complaint is being escalated from Stage 1, it is important that previous information is considered when arriving at an outcome.

#### 3.4.1 Complaint About a Staff Member

If the complaint is about a staff member, an initial discussion will be held with the complainant to discuss the details of the complaint. This can be done over the phone or in person. An informal meeting will be arranged by the Head of School or Unit with the complainant and respondent to hear both sides of the complaint and to seek resolution. Section 2.1 ‘[*Principles for Handling a Complaint*’](#_heading=h.30j0zll) contains potential options for redress for any resolution meeting. If the complainant is not happy with the outcome of the complaint, the case can be escalated to Stage 3 (Section 3.5 Stage 3 Escalation to Director/Dean).

### 3.5 Stage 3 - Escalation to Director of Unit/Dean

Stage 3 should only be accessed when all local and informal efforts have been exhausted within Stage 1 and 2. Stage 3 is considered a formal complaint stage. Commencement of Stage 3 begins with the submission of a **Student Complaint Review Form** by the complainant, including all relevant supporting documents, to the **Director of Unit or Dean.** Acknowledgement of the complaint should be within **10 working days**. A meeting will be held with the student to discuss face to face or online the details of the complaint. If a complaint is being escalated from Stage 1 and 2, it is important that previous information is taken into consideration, when arriving at an outcome. This should include a statement from the complainant regarding what efforts were made to resolve the issue at Stage 1 or 2 and what part of the complaint remains unresolved. Additionally, copies of the formal response from the Head of Unit/School should be submitted. Time should be allowed for a comprehensive investigation and suitable resolution with the aim of completing the investigation within **30 working days.** If a staff member is the subject of a complaint, they will be provided with full details of the complaint and a meeting will be held with the Director of Unit / Dean to allow them to respond to the complaint.

### 3.6 Office of the Ombudsman/Ombudsman for Children

The Office of the Ombudsman has jurisdiction to investigate the administrative actions undertaken by DCU. You may contact the [Office of the Ombudsman](https://www.ombudsman.ie/) at any time. The Ombudsman is an independent officer who investigates complaints and, where appropriate, may make recommendations concerning the administrative actions of the University. Information on lodging a complaint with the Ombudsman is available at ‘[Making a Complaint’](https://www.ombudsman.ie/making-a-complaint/make-a-complaint/).

Students under the age of 18 can contact the Ombudsman for Children at [OCO Complaints.](https://www.oco.ie/complaints/)

## 4.0 Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of staff engaging with this procedure are as laid down by the Student Complaint Policy.

## 5.0 Definitions

### 5.1 Complaint

"A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more DCU students about a DCU staff member or unit's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of a DCU staff member/unit"[[3]](#footnote-3).

### 5.2 DCU Staff Member

This includes staff from all units of the University, including academic, administrative, professional and support, including its research centres and campus companies.

### 5.3 Complainant

This includes any registered student at the University, including students registered on full time or part-time programmes, undergraduate programmes, taught and research postgraduate programmes, and on-line programmes.

## 6.0 Related Documentation

This procedure should be read in conjunction with:

* Student Complaint Policy
* [Dignity and Respect at Work and Study Policy](https://www.dcu.ie/policies/dignity-and-respect-work-and-study-policy)
* [Dignity and Respect Student Procedures](https://www.dcu.ie/students/bullying-sexual-consent-assault-harassment)
* [Sexual Misconduct at Work or Study Policy](https://www.dcu.ie/policies/sexual-misconduct-policy-students)
* [Sexual Misconduct Student Procedures](https://www.dcu.ie/students/bullying-sexual-consent-assault-harassment)
* [Student Gender Identity Policy](https://www.dcu.ie/policies/policies-a-z?field_policy_owner_target_id=All&title=)
* [Social Media policy](https://www.dcu.ie/policies/policies-a-z?field_policy_owner_target_id=All&title=)
* [Student Code of Conduct and Discipline](https://www.dcu.ie/ocoo/disciplinary-committee)
* [Guidance for Research Students and Supervisors in Respect of Resolving Difficulties Informally](https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/2020-11/guidance-for-research-students-supervisors-resolving-difficulties-informally-final.pdf)

## 7.0 Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Can I speak to someone before making a complaint?**

A: Yes, a student support professional can provide support to you prior to you making a complaint. A student support professional can include [DCU Student Advisers](https://www.dcu.ie/sal), [DCU Chaplains](https://www.dcu.ie/chaplaincy) or [Student Support Officer](https://www.dcu.ie/students)s. You can also contact the  [Students’ Union Sabbatical Officers](https://dcustudentlife.ie/) for advice.

**Q: How do I know who to contact?**

A: In the first instance, raise the matter with a member of staff within a specific unit or their line manager. If you know their name, contact details can be found on the [DCU Website](https://www.dcu.ie/). If you are unsure who to send the complaint to, contact the [Student Advice and Learning Skills Centre](https://www.dcu.ie/advice) and staff will be able help identify the correct DCU staff member to address the complaint. Additionally see [Appendix 1](#_heading=h.om96k84z0b49) for details of escalation points for students.

## 8.0 Contact

Any queries regarding this Policy should be directed to Deirdre Moloney, Student Policy Officer, Student Support & Development. Email Deirdre.moloney@dcu.ie

## 9.0 Procedure Review

This policy will be reviewed as and when changes are required. If no reviews are requested, the policy will be reviewed in 2026.

## 10.0 Version Control

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|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Procedure Name** | Procedure for the Student Complaint Policy |  |
| **Unit Owner**  | Student Support and Development |
| **Version Reference** | **Original Version 2.0** |  |
| **Approved by** | University Executive |  |
| **Effective Date** | 28.11.23 |  |

**End.**

### **Appendix 1**

**Contact Points for Complaints dealt with under the Student Complaints Policy**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Nature of Complaint** | **Stage 1 – Informal Procedure** | **Stage 2** **Escalation Point 1** | **Stage 3** **Escalation Point 2** |
| All aspects of academic programme delivery | Discuss with lecturer and / or Chairperson of Programme | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Head of relevant School | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Executive Dean of Faculty / School |
| All aspects of Postgraduate Research Programmes  | Discuss with lecturer, Supervisor or Chairperson of Programme  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Head of relevant School | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Executive Dean of Faculty / School  |
| All aspects of Postgraduate Taught Programmes | Discuss with lecturer, Supervisor or Chairperson of Programme  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Head of relevant School | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Executive Dean of Faculty / School |
| Careers Service | Discuss with relevant member of Careers Service staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Head of Careers | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Dean of Students |
| Counselling Service | Discuss with relevant member of Counselling Service staff  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Head of Counselling & Personal Development | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Dean of Students |
| Student Health Centre  | Discuss with relevant member of Student Health Centre staff  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Head of the Student Health Centre | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Dean of Students |
| Chaplaincy | Discuss with relevant member of Chaplaincy staff  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Head of Chaplaincy | Written complaint - completing the *Student Complaints Form* to the Dean of Students |
| DCU Placement Office  | Discuss with relevant member of Placement Office staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Director of the DCU Placement Office | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Vice-President Academic Affairs/Registrar |
| Sport /DCU Sport Facilities | Discuss with relevant member of Sport or DCU Sport Facilities staff  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Director of Sports | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Deputy President |
| Registry and Student Fees Services | Discuss with relevant member of Student Fees or Registry staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Director of Registry | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Vice-President Academic Affairs/Registrar |
| DCU Library  | Discuss with relevant member of Library staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Director of Library Services | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Deputy President |
| Information Systems & Services | Discuss with relevant member of Information Systems & Services staff  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Director of Information Systems & Services | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Chief Operations Officer |
| Physical Infrastructure | Discuss with relevant member of Estates Office staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Director of Estates | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Chief Operations Officer |
| Access Office | Discuss with relevant member of Access Office  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Head of Access | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Dean of Students |
| Disability & Learning Support  | Discuss with relevant member of Disability & Learning Support staff  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Head of Disability & Learning Support | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Dean of Students |
| Health & Safety Unit | Discuss with relevant member of Health & Safety staff  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Head of Health & Safety | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Chief Operations Officer |
| Faculty Offices  | Discuss with relevant member of Faculty Office staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the relevant Faculty Manager | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Dean of Faculty |
| School Offices’  | Discuss with relevant member of School Office staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the relevant Head of School.  | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Dean of Faculty. |
| Student Advice and Learning Skills Centre | Discuss with relevant member of Student Advice and Learning Skills Centre staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submitto the Student Advice and Learning Skills Centre Manager | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* to the Dean of Students |
| DCU Rooms / Campus Residences | Discuss with relevant member of Campus Residence staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the DCU Rooms General Manager or Operations Manager | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the Chief Operations Officer |
| DCU Restaurants / Cafes | Discuss with relevant member of hospitality staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to the DCU Restaurant/Cafe General Manager or Operations Manager | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to Chief Operations Officer |
| The Helix | Discuss with relevant member of hospitality staff | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* to The General Manager or Operations Manager | Written complaint - complete the *Student Complaints Form* and submit to Chief Operations Officer |

If you wish to complain about an area which is not listed above, please contact the DCU [Student Advice and Learning Skills Centre](https://www.dcu.ie/advice) and a staff member will be able to help identify the correct DCU staff member to address the complaint. Additionally if you are unsure if this is the correct policy to use in relation to your complaint, a Student Adviser in the [Student Advice and Learning Skills Centre](https://www.dcu.ie/advice) or the Student Policy Officer at deirdre.moloney@dcu.ie will be able to provide guidance.

1. Ombudsman.ie – Guide for Service Providers [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. adapted from The Office of the Ombudsman’s Guide to Developing a Complaint Handling System

 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. adapted from The Office of the Ombudsman’s Guide to Developing a Complaint Handling System [↑](#footnote-ref-3)