



# COMPLAINTS POLICY

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## 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Complaints Policy is to outline the standards and procedures that UL Student Life follow in their receiving and dealing with a complaint from anyone accessing our supports and services.

Our policy uses a systematic method for receiving, recording and responding to complaints, to ensure they are dealt with efficiently and effectively.

In line with our vision and mission statement, UL Student Life continuously endeavours to improve the lives of students by welcoming them into a friendly, fun environment that gives a real sense of belonging. We do this by championing students and delivering the best university life experience, and therefore take all complaints seriously.

## 2. DEFINITION

A complaint may be defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction or concern that needs a response”. The expression of dissatisfaction or concern may take the form of an informal or formal written complaint.

A complaint is more than purely an objection to the merits of a decision or action by the UL Student Life. Examples of complaints can be claims of impropriety, irregularity, misconduct, poor performance or ineffectiveness in the delivery of the service. In other words, a complaint is concerned with the manner in which a decision has been made or action taken, rather than with the decision or action itself.

## 3. WHAT IS NOT COVERED BY THIS PROCEDURE

UL Student Life are not responsible for the behaviour of students, nor do we police their behaviour. All UL Student Life volunteers <sup>1</sup>adhere to the UL Code of Conduct. The services we deliver are underpinned by clear policies and procedures that are upheld by staff and volunteers. All staff are governed by internal policies. If a student, a UL staff member or a member of the public has a negative encounter with a student, we advise they direct their concern to the University. There are 3 university policies; [Discipline Process](#), [Student Complaints](#) and/or Dignity & Respect policy, dealing with bullying and harassment issues, where the complainant should submit a formal complaint in writing to the Provost and Deputy President.

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<sup>1</sup> A UL Student Life volunteer is defined as a current UL student who offers their time for a specific task or role without receiving payment. A full list can be found in the UL Student Life Volunteer policy



#### **4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **4.1. Governing Body**

4.1.1 To review and approve the policy on a periodic basis.

##### **4.2. Complaints Officer**

4.2.1 To manage the complaints process for UL Student Life.

4.2.2 Maintain the Complaints Register.

4.2.3 Provide monthly reports to the Senior Management Team.

4.2.4 To escalate complaints where appropriate and liaise with HR Consultant for advice/support.

##### **4.3. Department Managers**

4.3.1 Make every effort to resolve complaints at a local level.

4.3.2 Manage complaints within their area following procedures for written and verbal complaints.

4.3.3 Provide feedback to staff on outcome of complaints.

4.3.4 Implement corrective/service improvements where appropriate.

##### **4.4. Staff/Members**

4.4.1 To adhere to policy statements in this document.

4.4.2 To report suspected breaches of policy.

#### **5. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THIS DOCUMENT**

5.1. We welcome comments and complaints and recognise their potential for improving services and programmes.

5.2. We seek to learn from complaints and comments.



- 5.3. We aim to resolve all complaints as locally and as speedily as possible while taking due care to deal with the complaint in a professional manner which aims to be fair to the complainant and to UL Student Life staff and /or Student Officers affected by it
- 5.4. We have appointed a Complaints Officer who will deal with the complaint.
- 5.5. We adhere to the GDPR and CCTV policies outlined in our Staff Handbook
- 5.6. We will record, monitor and report on all complaints
- 5.7. We will ensure that all staff are aware of this policy

## 6. HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

6.1. Anyone wishing to make a complaint can do so by visiting the UL Student Life webpage and filling out the complaints form. Once the complaints officer receives the complaint, they will decide the next steps.

### 6.2 Informal Procedure

Informal procedures are for quick problem solving rather than investigating and substantiating claims. They seek agreement and shared understanding of how to avoid problems in the future. Informal action is usually deemed appropriate by the UL Student Life Complaints Officer, where the allegations are less serious and there is a chance of quickly stopping the problem before it develops.

Informal ways of dealing with complaints include:

- The complainant asks the UL Student Life Complaints Officer to deal with the complaint confidentially and convey their concerns to the person being complained about without making any judgements, and re-state your policy.
- As a follow on from the above point, the UL Student Life Complaints Officer may bring the two sides together to conciliate, and the issue is resolved without investigation

A clear advantage of using the informal procedure is that the issue can be heard acknowledged and resolved in a short time. Through clear and transparent discussion, a satisfactory outcome is usually reached.



### 6.3.1 Formal Procedure

If the Complaints Officer deems it necessary or expedient to deal with a complaint by formal procedure, the complaint goes formal, and the complainant will be required to substantiate any allegations regarding the complaint i.e., evidence or proof of the complaint

Formal action is usually appropriate when:

- informal attempts have failed
- the allegations are of such a serious nature, it warrants the formal process
- discipline is a possible outcome if the allegations are substantiated
- the complainant has been victimized as a direct result of bringing forward a complaint

Formal ways of dealing with complaints include:

- investigating the allegations
- applying natural justice principles
- finding whether the allegations happened or were likely to have happened
- making a report to establish if there is a case to be answered to
- recommending an action or actions based on the learning from the investigation
- implementing an outcome.

In a formal procedure, document every step to ensure consistency and fairness. Meetings can be recorded as a form of minute taking.

The usual steps are:

- interview the person complaining and document the allegations
- inform the person being complained about of the details i.e. providing all evidence, and ask them to respond
- if the facts are disputed, conduct further investigation, which may include witnesses
- find whether the complaint has substance
- report the process, the evidence, the finding and recommend an outcome
- implement the outcome or decide on other action.



The staff involved can have a support person with them at any interviews or meetings in the form of a colleague or Union representative.

- 6.4. The member of staff taking the comment or complaint, usually the **Complaints Officer** will be responsible for doing so in strictest confidence and in a courteous and professional manner. The Complaints Officer may liaise with the external HR Consultant for advice on an individual complaint, if required. The complainant can expect a response to their initial complaint within 5 working days.

The complainant must provide:

- Their name and contact details and the nature of their complaint.
  - When, where and how the event / incident occurred
  - Who from UL Student Life, was involved in the alleged event / incident
  - What response would they like to see from UL Student Life?
- 6.5. The UL Student Life staff member taking the complaint, the Complaints Officer must advise the complainant that, if the complaint is made against a staff member, that staff member has a right to see that complaint in full, and any substantiating evidence, and right to reply to any allegations against them and a right to have reasonable time to prepare a reply to any allegations.
- 6.6. Complaints can only be received by the Complaints Officer through the complaints form on the website.
- 6.7. All complaints (and all actions taken) will be logged and recorded in line with GDPR. An overview of the complaints register will be reported to the Board of Directors, the General Manager and the Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis. The reports register will not disclose the complainant details or intimate details of the complaint. The purpose of the report is to make senior management aware of issues experienced, how they were managed, learnings, outcomes and relevant training to be held.

## 7. **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All complaints will be handled sensitively and in accordance with this Policy with due consideration to confidentiality with respect to both students and staff; however, it will not be possible or appropriate to maintain confidentiality in all circumstances.



## 8. **TIME LIMITS FOR MAKING A COMPLAINT**

A complaint must be made within 1 month of the date of the action giving rise to the complaint or within 1 month of the complainant becoming aware of the action giving rise to the complaint. A Complaints Officer may extend the time limit for making a complaint if, in the opinion of the Complaints Officer, special circumstances make it appropriate to do so. The Complaints Officer must notify the complainant of decision to extend / not extend time limits within 5 working days.

These special circumstances include but are not exclusive to the following:

- If the complainant is ill or bereaved
- If new relevant, significant and verifiable information relating to the action becomes available to the complainant
- If it is considered in the public interest to investigate the complaint
- If the complaint concerns an issue of such seriousness that it cannot be ignored
- Where extensive support was required to make the complaint and this took longer than 1 month.

## 10. **UL STUDENT LIFE KEY PRINCIPLES**

The Complaints Policy of UL Student Life must ensure that:

10.1 Every effort is made to resolve complaints at a local level.

10.2 UL Student Life provides a fair, full and impartial examination without penalty in respect of quality of service.

10.3 The procedures for making a complaint are simple and transparent.

10.4 There is assistance for complainants with special needs.

10.5 Confidentiality is maintained at all times.

10.6 Complaints are resolved within a pre-determined time where possible.



10.7 Complaints received through the complaints form on the website are acknowledged within 5 working days.

10.8 The complaints procedure is without prejudice to the any statutory right to make a complaint elsewhere.

10.9 UL Student Life organise general staff training and discussions to promote discrimination and harassment policies.

10.10 The Senior Management Team are provided with a trend analysis quarterly on recorded complaints for review and this information will be shared with the Board of Directors at regular intervals.