



Student Complaints

POLICY

Version: 6

1. INTRODUCTION

UCD is committed to providing an excellent education and high quality services to our students.

UCD continuously seeks to improve the student experience. From time to time problems arise, and students should be supported in expressing their dissatisfaction and seeking resolution to problems encountered. The University takes complaints seriously and endeavours to improve its processes and services by listening to, responding to, recording and resolving students' dissatisfaction. The following principles reflect the University's commitment to resolving complaints as quickly as possible with emphasis on local resolution. Students should feel free to raise concerns without risk of disadvantage and are encouraged to seek guidance and advice from a student support professional.

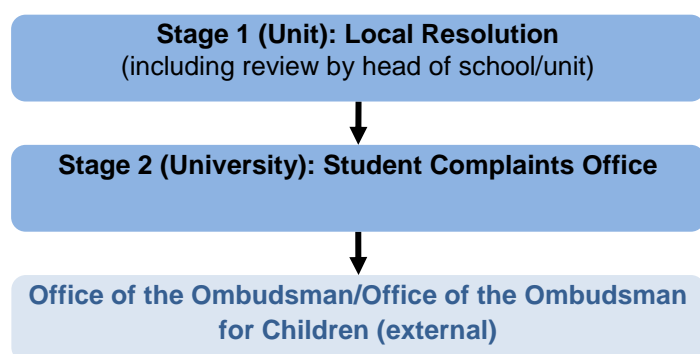
2. COMPLAINT HANDLING PRINCIPLES

The purpose of the *Student Complaints Policy and Procedure* (appendix 1) is to support students and staff in situations where a student makes a complaint about their experience at UCD. In this, the policy sets out the following principles that govern how UCD handles complaints¹:

- **Accessible and user-focused:** *clearly communicated, easily understood and places the complainant at the centre of the process.*
- **Simple and timely:** *involves limited steps and wherever possible seeks early resolution to the satisfaction of all*
- **Robust and fair:** *provides thorough evidence-based investigations in which the complaint handling principles are consistently applied*
- **Supports improvement:** *analysis of outcomes will support improvements in service quality and decision-making*

3. OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCESS

The University's complaint handling process comprises two levels; review and resolution at the unit level and investigation at the University level. The aim of this process is to resolve issues quickly and as close as possible to where the issue arises. Therefore it is expected that most complaints will be dealt with to satisfactory resolution at the first stage. Where resolution cannot be reached (or in instances where a student feels that they cannot raise the complaint at the local level) a complaint can be made to the University's Student Complaints Office. (See appendix 3 for process flowchart.)



¹ See Appendix 2 for further detail under each of the principles.



4. SCOPE

4.1 Complaints

For the purpose of the complaints handling policy and procedure, the University considers a complaint to be

an expression of significant or sustained dissatisfaction where a student seeks a specific action to address the issue, including an apology.²

Students may make complaints about any unit, function or service provided by the University or on behalf of the University. The definition of a complaint is necessarily broad and therefore the list provided is intended to guide users, and is not intended to be exhaustive. A complaint may relate to the following issues:

- the quality or standard of any service provided or failure to provide a service
- the quality of facilities or learning resources
- the failure of the University to follow an appropriate administrative process
- unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviour by a student or a staff member
- an alleged action or inaction by the University or a member of its staff

Not every issue raised with the University is a complaint. For example the following are not considered to be complaints under this policy:

- an appeal seeking a review of an academic decision on assessment, progression, completion or admission. The University provides separate appeals procedures to deal with these issues for undergraduate, graduate taught and graduate research students.
- an initial request for information.
- a request under the Freedom of Information Act or Data Protection Act.
- a request for information or an explanation about a regulation, policy or practice.
- a response to an invitation to provide feedback through a formal mechanism, for example questionnaire or online feedback.
- issues raised at student-staff consultative fora.

Where a complaint is deemed to be malicious or vexatious or where false information is submitted, disciplinary action under the UCD Student Code may be taken against the complainant. In such circumstances the student may complain directly to the Ombudsman/the Ombudsman for Children.

The *Student Complaints Policy* should be interpreted in light of the Children First Bill 2012, once enacted, and the University's Child Protection Policy.

4.2 Complainants

- Those eligible to make complaints under this policy are students who are currently registered as a UCD student or within three months of ceasing registration as a UCD student. Members of the public who wish to make complaints should consult the University's complaint procedure for members of the public.
- Where a complaint relates to UCD's actions in initiating or managing a collaborative relationship the complaint will be considered by UCD.
- Third party complaints on behalf of a student are not normally accepted. However, if a student is unable, because of incapacitation, to raise a complaint on their own, the student may authorise

² Adapted from the University of Nottingham *Student Complaints Policy*.



another individual to have access to personal information in order to pursue the complaint on their behalf. If a student is unable, because of incapacitation, to authorise another individual to pursue a complaint on their behalf, such event will be dealt with in good faith by the University on a case by case basis.

- Students under 18 years of age may authorise their parent/guardian to pursue a complaint on their behalf.
- Anonymous complaints will not be considered under the *Student Complaints Policy*.
- Students may make complaints jointly, if desired.

4.3 Alternative Complaint Policies and Processes

The University provides separate policies and processes for certain categories of complaint. Students should seek the advice of a University student support professional for guidance about which is the appropriate complaint mechanism. Alternative University complaint processes are subject to the same complaints handling principles outlined in section 2 (and appendix 2).

- Complaints of harassment, including sexual harassment and bullying, are dealt with under the [Policy on Dignity and Respect](#).
- Complaints about the conduct of students are normally handled under the [UCD Student Code](#).
- Complaints under the Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004 may be made pursuant to the procedures set out at <http://www.equality.ie/en/Information/Equal-Status/>
- Complaints relating to non-compliance with legislation where, under the legislation, the University must appoint a special inquiry officer. For example, [the Disability Act, 2005](#).
- A complaint relating to an alleged clinical error by UCD Healthcare staff: where this has not been resolved locally with UCD Healthcare Services, a student may raise their complaint to the [appropriate](#) professional or statutory body.
- In the event that matters of a staff disciplinary nature arise they will be dealt with separately, at the discretion of the University, through the agreed staff disciplinary process.

Where a student wishes to make a complaint about services/activities carried out by persons on behalf of the University in the performance of duties, work or other University activity, the student shall, where possible, raise the complaint with the service provider in the first instance. Where this is not possible, the student shall raise the complaint directly to the Student Complaints Officer who may then refer the complaint to the relevant body for resolution.

Where a complaint involves an individual member of staff that member of staff has a right to respond as part of the complaints handling process at local and University stages.

It is acknowledged that some situations can involve a combination of issues, some of which are complaints and others are not. In such circumstances more than one University process may be applicable. In such circumstances the Registrar shall decide which of the University's processes should have priority or be the most appropriate in the circumstances, and may direct the continuation of some processes and the suspension of others pending the outcome of the former.

In addition, where the Investigating Officer and the Student Complaint Officer are in agreement that the matter would be more appropriately dealt with by An Garda Síochána or another statutory body, the Student Complaints Officer will inform the student and the respondent. In such cases the matter will be suspended by the University, pending the outcome of the external investigation.



4.4 Time lines

To enable prompt resolution complaints should be raised as soon as problems arise. The University expects that complaints will normally be raised within 15 working days, starting from when the complainant first became aware of the problem. The University will exercise discretion in consideration of complaints beyond this time limit.

The University will respond to and deal with complaints as quickly as possible. At the local level heads of unit should ensure that their staff acknowledge and respond to complaints promptly. It is expected that complaints will be resolved within 15 working days of receipt of complaint at local level, and within 15 working days of receipt of complaint for review by the head of unit. At the University level complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days and full responses will be provided no later than 15 working days after receipt of complaint.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All Staff

All staff should be aware of the University's student complaint policy and process and how to handle and record complaints at the local resolution stage. As the majority of complaints are likely to be dealt with locally, staff should be appropriately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training and supervision. Staff need clear guidance from their head of unit about the type of complaints they can deal with directly and those that should be escalated. See appendix 6 for guidelines on complaint handling.

Head of Unit

Local responsibility for the implementation of this policy (i.e. Stage 1) lies with the head of unit. The head of unit will receive appropriate training and guidelines. Responsibilities of heads of unit in respect of complaint handling include:

- Ensuring staff within their Unit are provided with information and guidelines on complaint handling, including good practice guidelines and other relevant publications that may be produced by the Office of the Ombudsman/Office of the Ombudsman for Children.
- Ensuring that the unit complies with the recommendations for resolution made by the Investigating Officer.
- Ensuring that student complaint records are established and maintained and that data in relation to complaints is provided and reported to the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints (in the form of an annual report), investigating officers or the Student Complaints Officer as required.

Student Complaints Officer

The Student Complaints Officer is responsible for managing student complaints made at stage 2 of the process and complaints which cannot be appropriately handled at the local level (i.e. stage 1). The Student Complaints Officer will:

- Manage complaints received by their office through the process (including logging and tracking of complaints through to completion).
- Liaise and communicate with complainants, respondents and Investigating Officers relating to complaints investigations and their outcomes.
- Report incidents of non-compliance with outcomes of an investigation to the Chair of the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints.
- Produce information and reports for the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints and support and liaise with the Chair of the Committee as necessary.
- Ensure that a record of the nature of the complaint, the time taken to deal with it and the outcome will be maintained.
- Maintain and update the Student Complaints Procedure as required.



Investigating Officer

The Investigating Officer is a suitably trained staff member responsible for the conduct of the complaints investigation and is responsible for leading the investigation, and the investigation and co-ordination of response to the complainant. This includes preparing a written report, including any recommended procedural changes to service delivery. Investigating Officers must have a clear remit to investigate effectively and reach robust decisions on more complex complaints. This also requires clear direction and support from the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints on the extent and limits of discretion and responsibilities in investigating and recommending resolutions to complaints. The Investigating Officer will submit all reports and recommendations to the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints for final decision. The Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints may grant an Investigating Officer delegated authority to deal with complaints promptly, where appropriate.

The Investigating Officer will have had no prior involvement with a case, including at stage 1.

Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints*

Primary functions of the Committee will include:

- Provide oversight of student complaints management and operation of student complaints handling.
- Report to Academic Council annually.
- Approve and maintain panel of Investigating Officers.
- Monitor and review the student complaints policy and procedure, proposing revisions for the Office of the Ombudsman/Office of the Ombudsman for Children, where relevant.
- Based on the report and recommendations of the Investigating Officer, the Chair of the Committee will have delegated authority of the Committee to make the final decision in all student complaint cases.
- The Committee may delegate any of its functions to the Chair of the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints.

The Chair of the Committee will also liaise with the Student Complaints Officer on issues arising in relation to individual cases where necessary.

*Note: Pending outcomes of the Review of Academic Council and its committees please note, the role of the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints will be fulfilled by an interim committee, established by Academic Council Executive Committee 11/09/14.



Appendix 1 Student Complaint Procedure



University College Dublin Student Complaints Procedure

1. INTRODUCTION

UCD is committed to providing an excellent education and high quality services to our students, but recognises that, from time to time problems may arise. The University takes complaints seriously and endeavours to improve its processes and services by listening to, responding to, recording and resolving students' dissatisfaction. The following principles reflect the University's commitment to resolving complaints as quickly as possible with emphasis on local resolution. Students should feel free to raise concerns without risk of disadvantage and are encouraged to seek guidance and advice from a student support professional.

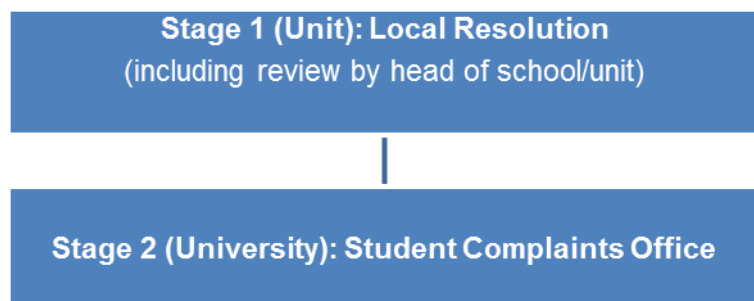
The University's complaint handling principles are to ensure that the process is

- **Accessible and user-focused:** *clearly communicated, easily understood and places the complainant at the centre of the process.*
- **Simple and timely:** *involves limited steps and wherever possible seeks early resolution to the satisfaction of all*
- **Robust and fair:** *provides thorough evidence-based investigations in which the complaint handling principles are consistently applied*
- **Supports improvement:** *analysis of outcomes will support improvements in service quality and decision-making*

The following procedures should be read in conjunction with the [Student Complaint Policy](#).

2. PROCESS *(see flowchart below)*

The aim of the University's complaint handling process is to resolve problems quickly and as close as possible to where the issue arises. It is expected that most complaints can be dealt with to satisfactory resolution at the first stage (at the school/ unit/ service provider where the issue arises). Where resolution cannot be reached a complaint can be made to the University's Student Complaints Office.



2.1 Stage 1 – Local Resolution / Unit Review

Students are advised to raise concerns as soon as possible (and no later than 15 working days) after becoming aware of an issue, directly with the area (school, unit or service provider) in which the issue has occurred. At this stage complaints may be made face-to-face, by phone, by email or letter or using the specified local process. Students should explain the nature of their complaint clearly and concisely, provide as many relevant details as possible and indicate what outcome they seek.

Actions under local resolution include review by the relevant head of unit/school/service provider, where a complainant is not satisfied with the initial response received. The [Student Complaints Form: Head of Unit Review](#) should be completed in such cases.

When reviewing complaints, the head of unit or their nominee should

- Where possible, hold face-to-face discussions separately with the student, and any relevant member of staff
- Determine, based on the available information, whether the complaint should be upheld, with reference to the specific action to address the issue sought by the student
- Communicate the outcome of the review to the student within 15 working days. The communication should inform them that if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of this process they may submit a complaint to University's Student Complaints Officer for formal investigation. It should also provide information on how they may do so and the timeframe within which the complaint must be raised (15 working days from the date of the email sent informing them of the outcome).
- Where the timeframe of 15 working days for resolving the complaint cannot be met, inform the student and respondent outlining the reasons for the delay and when it is anticipated that the outcome will be available instead.

2.2 Stage 2 - University Level Investigation

Stage 2 of the procedure deals with two kinds of complaints: complaints that could not be satisfactorily resolved at the local level (stage 1), or complaints that have been identified as requiring investigation at University level from the outset. Complaints made at stage 2 are handled by the Student Complaints Officer.

Submitting a Complaint

Complaints should be submitted using the [Student Complaint Form: University Review](#). The University will log all complaints and acknowledge receipt of the complaint to the complainant within five working days.

Investigation

The Student Complaints Officer will commence the investigation by appointing a member of staff (from an approved panel of staff) as Investigating Officer. The Investigating Officer will review the complaint, taking account of any documentation supplied by the complainant and information supplied by the relevant area(s) of the University (including where the complaint involves an individual member of staff as respondent). The Investigating Officer will write a report, including recommendations for resolution, and submit this to the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints for final decision.

Specifically, the Student Complaints Officer will further support the investigation as follows:

- Assess a complaint to ascertain whether it is malicious or vexatious or whether false information was submitted and, in such cases, inform the student in writing.
- Where a complaint is made at University level before the matter was raised locally (stage 1) and where appropriate, refer any matter back to the relevant head of unit to try to resolve the matter locally if possible.
- Inform the student and respondent in writing of the outcome(s) of the Investigating Officer's investigation and the final decision of the Committee.
- Inform the student that if they are not satisfied with the outcome they may raise their complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman/Office of the Ombudsman for Children.



- Where the timeframe of 15 working days for resolving the complaint cannot be met, inform the student and respondent outlining the reasons for the delay and when it is anticipated that the outcome will be available instead.

2.3 Outcomes

Recommended resolutions and the decisions of the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints* will be detailed in a report to the Student Complaints Officer who will inform the complainant and respondent of the outcomes.

3. OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

If a student has exhausted the University's internal complaint process and remains dissatisfied with the handling of their complaint they may complain to the Office of the Ombudsman. Students under the age of 18 should refer their complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

Information on how to complain to the Office of the Ombudsman and its processes of investigation can be found on the Office of the Ombudsman website at: <https://www.ombudsman.gov.ie/en/Make-a-Complaint/Complaint-online-form/>.

Information on how to complain to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and its processes of investigation can be found on the Office of the Ombudsman for Children website at: <http://www.oco.ie/complaints/overview.html>.

*Note: Pending outcomes of the Review of Academic Council and its committees please note, the role of the Academic Council Committee for Student Complaints will be fulfilled by an interim committee, established by Academic Council Executive Committee 11/09/14.



Appendix 2: UCD Complaint Handling Principles

The UCD complaints handling process is:

Accessible & User-focused: clearly communicated, easily understood and places the complainant at the centre of the process.

- *Complaints are valued and respected as a right and responsibility; complainants should feel supported*
- *Complainants and respondents are listened to carefully and treated with respect*
- *Complaints are treated in confidence where possible*

Simple and Timely: involves limited steps and wherever possible seeks early resolution to the satisfaction of all.

- *Complaints are addressed within reasonable and clearly published timescales*
- *Where timescales cannot be adhered to (arising from complex complaints, for example) complainants will be kept informed of reasons for delay and projected timescales*
- *Staff will be trained and empowered to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity as appropriate*

Robust and Fair: provides thorough evidence-based investigations in which the complaint handling principles are consistently applied.

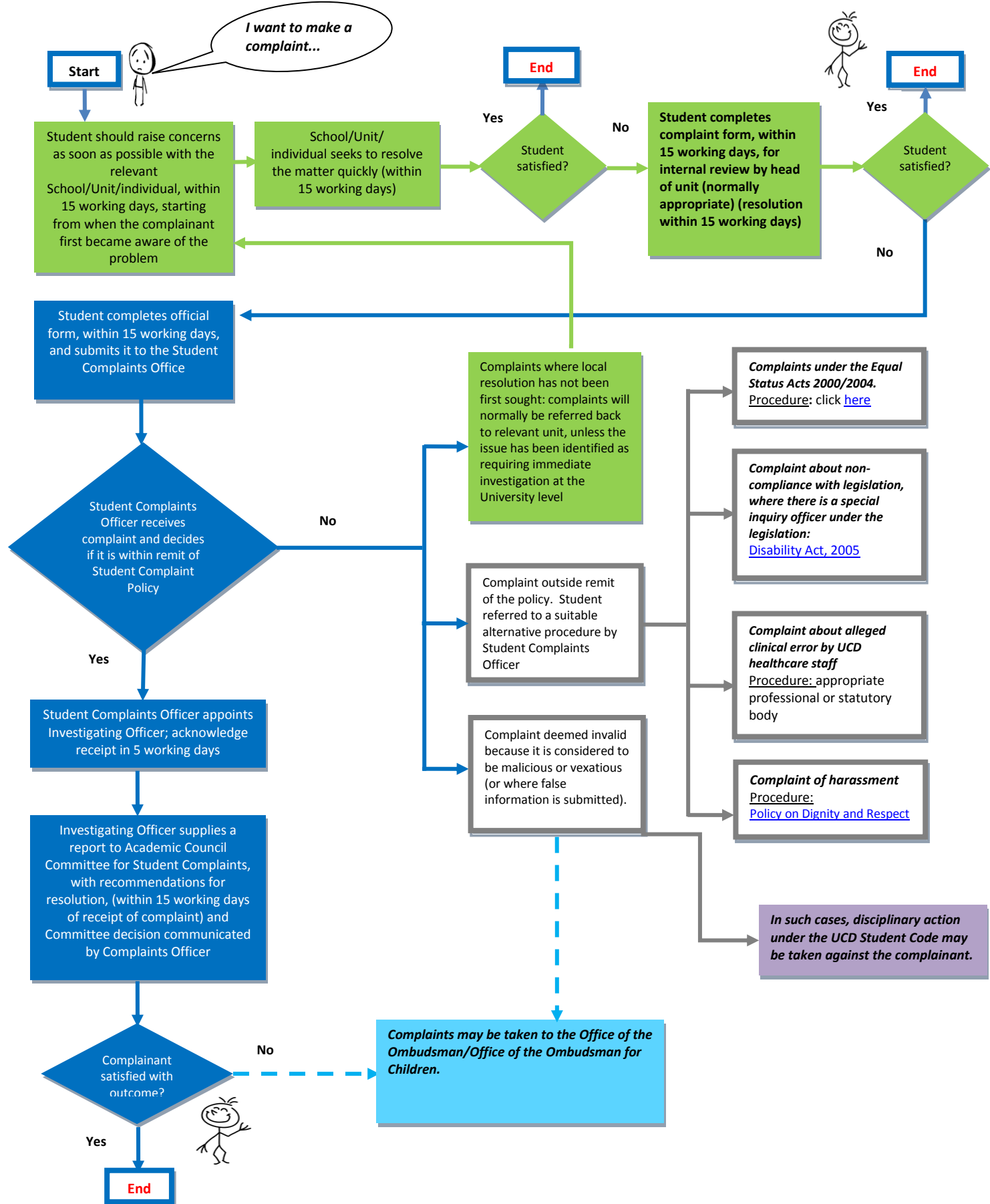
- *No complainant shall suffer any bias or prejudice as a result of making a complaint*

Supports improvement: analysis of outcomes will support improvements in service quality and decision-making.

- *The Complaint Handling Procedure is clearly articulated and published. It aims to reflect and enhance a culture of good service delivery and decision-making*
- *There will be consistent recording of information about complaints in order to identify trends and inform improvements*
- *The procedures and their outcomes will be regularly reviewed*



Appendix 3: Student Complaint Process



Appendix 4: Student Complaint Form: Head of Unit Review**Student Complaints Form****Request to a head of unit to review a complaint**

Please type below and the boxes will expand

Request addressed to (name/position)

Student Name

Student id number

Programme

Year and stage (e.g. 2013/14, stage 3)

Please conduct a review of my complaint described below. I have read the University's Student Complaints Policy, and I confirm that I have already tried to resolve the matter locally.

Signature:

My complaint is:

In an attempt to resolve my complaint locally I have already communicated with the following people:

This is what happened, and why it did not resolve my complaint:

This is the evidence supporting my complaint, and I have attached copies of any relevant documents:

To resolve my complaint I would like the following to happen³:

Date

³ If you are asking for some financial redress, you must say what the figure is, and explain in detail, with supporting evidence, what financial loss you have incurred



Appendix 5: Student Complaint Form: University Review**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
Request for Complaint Investigation****Information for complainants**

If you have a complaint about a matter which is the responsibility of the University, and you have not been able to resolve it by raising the issue directly with the appropriate School or unit, please complete the form below to enable us to investigate your complaint. Before doing so, please read the [guidance](#).

If you have relevant documentary evidence to support your complaint, it should be submitted with this form. Evidence submitted should be as concise as possible and relevant to the complaint. Investigation of your complaint will not commence until you confirm that your supporting documentation is complete. Please see Section 3 of the form.

We strongly encourage you to speak to a UCD student support professional before completing this form. A UCD student support professional can:

- Outline the options available to students to express their complaint or concern. Explain how the complaint procedure works, and what the potential outcomes may be
- Read drafts of any correspondence students write to the University (including complaint forms), to help students make their case as clearly as possible
- Support students at any meetings they attend with University staff in relation to their complaint if requested.

A UCD student support professional includes UCD Student Advisers, a member of the UCD Access Centre, official UCD student counsellor, UCD Chaplain, UCD Students' Union. An up-to-date list of these support systems can be accessed at <http://www.ucd.ie/students/studentsupport.html>.

Once completed, this form should be submitted by email to student.complaints@ucd.ie



1. Personal Details

First Name:	
Surname/family name:	
Address:	
Email:	
Telephone:	
Programme of Study :	
Student ID No:	

2. Your Complaint

A. Please provide a summary of your complaint below (300 words max).

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- B. Please describe what action you have taken to pursue the complaint to date, including the specific action you originally sought in order to address the issue (200 words max).

- C. Please provide a brief explanation of the issue(s) you consider to be unresolved (200 words max).



- D. Please explain how you would like your complaint to be resolved (200 words max). Please bear in mind that if you are asking for some financial redress, you must state what the figure is, and explain in detail, with supporting evidence, what financial loss you have incurred..

- E. If you are submitting a complaint more than 20 working days following the last related incident (including the outcome of the review by head of unit), please provide a brief explanation for the delay (200 words max).

3. Supporting documentation

Do you wish to submit any supporting documentation for consideration? Yes/No

If "Yes", please tick here to indicate that what you have submitted is complete

☐

Signature: _____

Date: _____



Appendix 6: Complaint Handling - Guidelines for staff

As the majority of complaints are likely to be dealt with locally, Staff members require training and guidance in developing good complaint handling skills. The following guidelines are provided to help staff to deal with and respond to complaints when being made in person or via the telephone.

Step 1: Establish whether the complaint relates to your area of work and whether it is within the authority of your unit to resolve the matter. If not provide the complainant with the contact details of the relevant area. Where possible avoid transferring the complainant from person to person.

In order to handle complaints effectively staff should try to:

- Treat complainants courteously and professionally at all times.
- Where the complaint is being made in person, provide your own name, greet the person in a positive manner and ask how you can help.
- Listen carefully to what the person has to say and give them enough time to express their complaint in full. Sometimes complainants will feel the need to express their anger about a situation. Listening and acknowledging that you understand the issue may help to alleviate a stressful situation.
- Summarise the complaint back to the person to demonstrate that you have understood, and seek clarifications of points that aren't clear to you. If it is unclear from the initial conversation what remedy is being sought by the complainant, ask what solution(s) might help.
- If you have sufficient knowledge about the issue, provide relevant information that will assist the complainant to better understand the decision or the action that they are aggrieved about. If you do not have sufficient information, assure the complainant that someone will follow up with them about their complaint as soon as possible, but within 15 working days.
- Manage the expectations of the complainant about what outcomes might possibly be achieved.
- Even if you feel the complaint is unjustified the person's sense of grievance is real and therefore complaints should never be dismissed out of hand. Instead you should endeavour to provide information and give reasons if the complaint has arisen from misunderstanding.
- Where possible take responsibility to resolve the problem on the spot.
- Resolution of the situation might be achieved by a relatively simple action, such as an apology, explanation or the provision of information. If on the spot solutions are not possible outline possible options for redress and seek agreement of complainant of these.
- If you are not in a position or do not have the authority to agree a remedy or action being sought escalate the complaint to an appropriate person for decision (e.g. the head of unit or their nominee).
- If the complainant is not satisfied with your attempts to resolve the matter advise that the complaint can be reviewed by the Head of Unit. Provide complainants with the following information: the name and email address of the head of unit, how to submit their complaint (i.e. by email on the official University form – *Student Complaint Form: Head of Unit Review*) and the timeframe within which the complaint must be raised.
- A record of the complaint should be made which should include the following information: complainant's name(s), student number(s) and UCD connect email address(es), a summary of the complaint (what happened, when, where, who was involved and what the impact on the complainant was) and the specific action to address the issue sought by the student.

Local Complaint Handling Check List

- ☐ Listen effectively (where the complaint is made by phone or in person)
- ☐ Demonstrate empathy
- ☐ Understand the complainant's needs and the remedy sought
- ☐ Ask the right questions
- ☐ Offer an apology, where appropriate

