

# Student Complaints || Staff Guidelines

## WHAT IS A STUDENT COMPLAINT?

UCD is committed to supporting students in expressing dissatisfaction and seeking resolution to any problems encountered while studying here. The University defines a complaint as **an expression of significant or sustained dissatisfaction where a student seeks a specific action to address the issue, including an apology.**

To ensure that problems can be addressed quickly students are encouraged to raise concerns directly with the relevant person or area of the University. It may be possible for issues to be addressed simply and quickly without the need for a formal complaint. However, if dissatisfied with the initial response, students may seek to make a formal complaint under the University's [Student Complaint Policy](#).

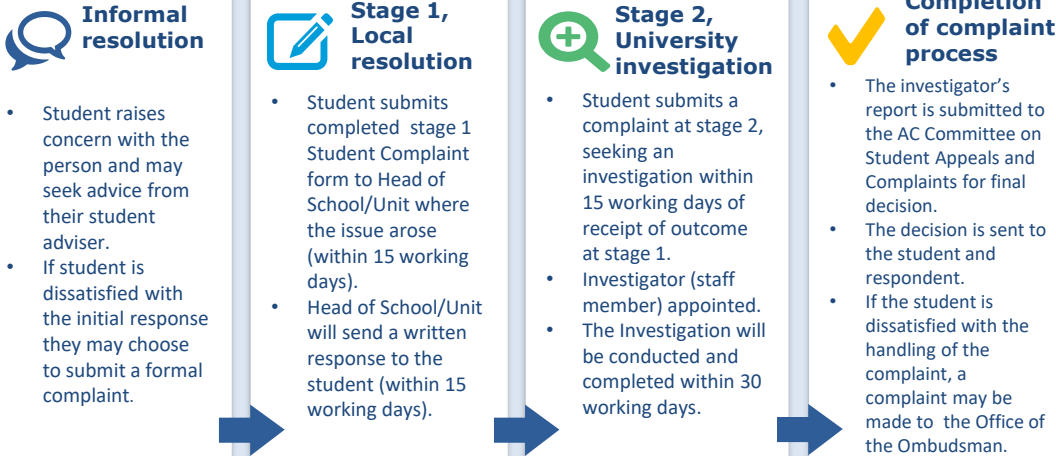
## WHAT CAN STUDENTS MAKE A COMPLAINT ABOUT?

Formal student complaints can be made about the quality or standard of University services. This includes:

- Quality or standard of any service provided, or failure to provide a service.
- Quality of facilities or learning resources.
- Failure by the University to follow its administrative processes.
- Unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviour by a staff member.
- An alleged action or inaction by the University or a member of its staff.

There is a separate process for complaints of bullying and harassment. See [UCD Dignity and Respect Policy](#).

## STUDENT COMPLAINT PROCESS



## COMPLAINT HANDLING GUIDELINES – Informal resolution

The majority of complaints can be dealt with outside of the University's student complaint handling process. Getting it right at the front-line may achieve early resolution without the need for the student to escalate the matter to the formal complaint process. The following guidelines are provided to help staff respond when issues are raised and to provide guidance to Heads of School/Units when they receive a formal complaint under the University's [Student Complaint Policy](#).

- Treat complainants courteously and professionally. It's useful to give the complainant your name.
- Before responding to a complaint, make sure it falls within the authority of your area to resolve the matter. If not, provide the complainant with the contact details of the relevant area. It may be helpful, where possible, to introduce/direct the student to the relevant staff member who can deal with the matter.
- Treat the complainant with empathy and bear in mind that even if you feel the complaint is unjustified, the complainant's sense of grievance is real.
- Listen carefully to what the person has to say and give them enough time to express their complaint. Summarising the complaint back is useful in demonstrating that you have understood the issues. Seek clarifications on any points that are not clear to you.
- Check what solutions/remedies the complainant is looking for.
- It is helpful to manage the expectations of the complainant about what outcomes might possibly be achieved.
- If appropriate, provide information that will assist the complainant to better understand the decision or the action that they are aggrieved about.
- If there is no apparent solution to their issue, show empathy and understanding.
- If you do not have sufficient information to address their concern, tell the complainant that someone will follow up with them about their complaint as quickly as possible, and no later than 15 working days.
- Offer an apology, where appropriate, or provide relevant information/explanation to the complainant.
- If an on the spot solution is not possible, outline possible options for remedy and seek the agreement of the complainant.
- If a straightforward local solution is not possible, escalate the complaint to an appropriate person for decision (e.g. the Head of School/Unit or their nominee).
- If the complainant is not satisfied with your attempts to resolve the matter, advise them that the complaint can be reviewed by the Head of School/Unit. Provide complainants with the following information: the name and email address of the Head of School/Unit; the [Student Complaint Form: Head of School/Unit Review](#); and - the timeframe within which the complaint must be raised (as soon as possible and no more than 15 working days since the student's last interaction with the School/Unit on the matter).

# Student Complaints || Staff Guidelines

## FORMAL REVIEW BY HEAD OF SCHOOL/UNIT – Stage 1

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 Complaint Form: Head of School/Unit Review](#) should be completed in such cases.

When reviewing complaints, the Head of School/Unit or their nominee should:

- Where possible, hold face-to-face discussions separately with the student, and any relevant member of staff, to be clear about the exact nature of the complaint and that it falls within the scope of the Student Complaint process.
- Review any documentation supplied by the student, and any information provided by any relevant member of staff.
- Heads of School/Unit are not mandated to appoint an investigator to conduct a full investigation of the complaint but for complex complaints may find it useful to construct a chronology of what has occurred, on the basis of material submitted and discussions with the student and relevant staff members.
- Determine, based on the available information, whether the complaint should be upheld, and provide a full response to the student's expressed dissatisfaction, with reference to the specific action to address the issue sought by the student.
- Where consideration of the complaint has been delegated to a nominee, the Head of School/Unit retains responsibility and must approve the findings and proposed response.
- Communicate formally in writing the outcome of the review to the student within 15 working days. This communication should address any issues raised by the student that fall within the scope of the Student Complaint Policy.
- The communication should inform the student that if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of this process they may submit a complaint to the University's Student Complaints Officer for formal investigation, including a link to online information on the process <http://www.ucd.ie/secca/studentcomplaints/>. It should also provide information on the timeframe within which the complaint must be raised (no more than 15 working days from the date of the email sent informing them of the outcome). Response templates are available on request.
- 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.
- Keep a record of the complaint: this should include the complainant's name, student number and UCD Connect email address; a summary of the complaint (what happened, when, where, who was involved and what the impact on the complainant was); the date the complaint was received by the Unit; specific action undertaken by the Unit to address the issue; the date when the response/resolution was provided to the student.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

**Dr Aoife Duignan**, Student Complaints Officer

Email: [student.complaints@ucd.ie](mailto:student.complaints@ucd.ie) // Tel: +353 (0)1 716 7135

Website: <http://www.ucd.ie/secca/studentcomplaints/>

The [Office of the Ombudsman](#) provides guidance on good practice in complaint handling.

