

EXTERNAL PERSONS COMPLAINTS POLICY

1 The University of Law's External Persons Complaints Policy has been informed by the Office for Students Sector-Recognized Standards and the General Ongoing Conditions of Registration and has regard to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. These definitive reference points for all English higher education institutions set out how academic standards are established and maintained and how excellence in the quality of learning opportunities is assured.

This policy sits within The University of Law's Quality and Standards Code, which provides a suite of policies designed to safeguard the academic standards of The University of Law and to assure the quality of learning opportunities offered; this policy should therefore be read in conjunction with other relevant policies within the code.

Procedure for Concerns or Complaints by Persons External to the University of Law

2 The University of Law (the University) aims to provide a quality service which meets the highest expectations of its staff. The University welcomes all constructive feedback on its activities, whether positive or negative and understands that, from time to time, people or organisations external to the University may be dissatisfied or concerned with the way the University, its staff or students have acted. The University will respond positively, where necessary, by improving procedures, correcting mistakes and learning from experience. This procedure aims to provide a mechanism which will deal with genuine complaints of impropriety, irregularity, misconduct, poor performance or ineffectiveness against the University in a timely and open way.

Who may raise a concern or complaint?

3 Anyone who is affected by the activities of the University, including those receiving or seeking a service or who have been subject to a decision of the University.

4 Current or former students of the University may not use this procedure and are directed in the first instance to the University's policy under Q9: Academic appeals and student complaints. Copies can be obtained from Academic Registry at academic.registry@law.ac.uk or by downloading from the internet at <http://www.law.ac.uk/about/policies/>

Before you raise a concern or complaint

5 The University expects you to consider all appropriate procedures to make your point, such as suggestion schemes or other feedback mechanisms before bringing a complaint.

What information must the complaint contain?

- 6 How you (individually or as a group) have been affected by the activities of the University including dates, times and places of any particular incidents and the full names of any people against whom you are complaining or who can provide evidence in support of your complaint.
- 7 Any specific issues which you want to be considered.
- 8 What outcome(s) you hope to achieve from the complaints process.

Raising an initial concern or complaint (informal)

9 Complaints can often be resolved satisfactorily and dealt with quickly on an informal basis. If possible, talk informally to the staff member most directly involved in the situation you wish to complain about and as soon as possible after the situation arises. Alternatively, ask to speak to a manager who is not directly involved in the situation. You must make your complaint within 28 calendar days of the incident complained of (or provide a full explanation for the delay).

10 The staff member will attempt to resolve the complaint and, within seven calendar days of it being received will acknowledge its receipt and as soon as possible thereafter, will write to you with one of the following outcomes:

- 10.1 the complaint has been resolved;
- 10.2 the complaint requires more time to investigate the matter (s) raised;
- 10.3 the complaint can be resolved (stating a specified timescale for resolution, if possible);
- 10.4 the complaint cannot be resolved in the way you require and you can pursue a formal complaint if you wish.

Making a Formal Complaint

11 Stage 1 – Initiating a formal complaint

- 11.1 If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the informal process, you may initiate a formal complaint. Formal complaints must be submitted within 14 calendar days of your receipt of the outcome to your informal complaint. Forms are available from complaints@law.ac.uk All formal complaints must be submitted in writing with appropriate supporting evidence on the Formal Complaints Application Form and submitted to the University Complaints Officer (complaints@law.ac.uk). The Formal Complaints Application Form provides full details of the appropriate place for submission, along with guidance as to how to complete it. Submission is accepted by post or by email.

- 11.2 All formal complaints will be dealt with by an Investigating Officer who is a senior member of the University not previously involved in the informal stage. You will be informed of the details of the Investigating Officer and the timescales.
- 11.3 You may be asked to provide further information and/or to attend a meeting to discuss your case. The discussion may also take place by telephone or email, whichever is the most appropriate.
- 11.4 The Investigating Officer undertakes a full investigation and prepares an outcome report, which is then reviewed and approved by the Head of Complaints. You will then receive a copy of the written outcome report from the investigation and any action that will be taken together with details of how to apply for a review of the decision if you are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation.

12 **Stage 2 – Complaint Appeal**

- 12.1 If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the formal complaint, you may request an appeal of the procedure, which is carried out by an Appeal Officer who is a senior member of the University staff, not previously involved in the investigation of the complaint.
- 12.2 The Appeal Application Form is sent to you together with notification of the outcome of the investigation into the original formal complaint, and provides full details of the appropriate place for its submission, accepted by post or email.
- 12.3 The Appeal Application must be submitted within 14 calendar days of the date of the outcome report from the University following the investigation of the formal complaint. The University does not consider any request for appeal received outside this time limit unless you are able to provide evidence of exceptional circumstances which justify the delay in submission.
- 12.4 The appeal application must outline the reasons for dissatisfaction with the outcome. It is not sufficient simply to reiterate the original formal complaint.
- 12.5 For an appeal to be considered, you must:
 - 12.5.1 Provide further evidence to substantiate the complaint, together with a full explanation of why the evidence was not supplied with the formal complaint;
 - Or
 - 12.5.2 Demonstrate that the formal complaints procedure was not followed correctly and that this had a detrimental impact on the outcome;
 - Or

- 12.5.3 Demonstrate that, despite having followed the correct procedures, the decision reached was one that no reasonable body, properly directed and taking into account all relevant factors, could have arrived at
- 12.6 You will be provided with the details of the Appeal Officer for your case and the timescale for the investigation.
- 12.7 As with the original investigation into the formal complaint, you may be asked to provide further information and/or to attend a meeting to discuss your case with the Appeal Officer. If it is not possible to meet in person the discussion may be conducted by telephone or email where appropriate.
- 12.8 The Appeal Officer undertakes full investigation of the complaint, and the process of the initial investigation, and produces a written outcome report, which is then reviewed and commented on by the Head of Complaints for consistency. The report is then sent to an Appeal Panel, made up of three senior members of staff, for approval. You will receive a copy of the written outcome report from the appeal and any action that will be taken, within five weeks of acknowledgement of the request for appeal.
- 12.9 The outcome of the Appeal, Stage 2, is the final decision and there will be no further avenue to review within the University.

What you can expect from the University

- 13 The University will:
- 13.1 deal impartially with your complaint within the time frames set out above and in a polite and straight forward way;
- 13.2 maintain confidentiality throughout the complaint process, revealing information to others only to the extent necessary to complete a proper investigation and make a considered response and keeping the record of your complaint separate from other records;
- 13.3 ensure that no complaint will be used to your disadvantage in the future.

What the University will expect from you

- 14 You will:
- 14.1 be open, honest and prompt in your dealings with the University;
- 14.2 be prompt in submitting the complaint within the time limits;
- 14.3 explain your complaint clearly and concisely;

14.4 allow the University a reasonable time to deal with the complaint effectively;

14.5 attempt informal resolution if at all possible.

Vexatious or Malicious Complaints

15 The University may refuse to deal with a complaint if it is, in the University's view, vexatious or malicious. The decision not to investigate a complaint on this basis is at the sole discretion of the University.

16 A vexatious complaint is one which is entirely without merit and is made with the intention of causing inconvenience, harassment or expense to the company. Where it is readily apparent that a complaint is vexatious the University will reject the complaint.

17 A malicious complaint is one which bears active ill-will or spite or demonstrates wrongful intention toward any other. Where it is clear that a complaint is malicious, the University will reject the complaint.

Anonymous Complaints

18 Anonymous complaints will be forwarded to the most appropriate staff member to look into as part of the early resolution stage of the process. However, no formal outcome will be produced as it is not possible to respond to an anonymous complainant.

Complaints Involving the Police

19 If at any point during complaint proceedings, the complainant reports the matter to the police, unless it has been authorised in writing by the Group Legal Counsel (or his delegate within the University's legal team), action under this policy, must be stayed until the outcome of the police investigation, and any criminal proceedings which result from it, are completed. On the conclusion of any police investigation or any criminal proceedings the Head of Complaints, following consultation with the Group Legal Counsel (or his delegate within the University's legal team), will notify the complainant in writing whether the University's internal complaint investigation will be re-started or not.

20 The above also applies for any matter that is or becomes the subject of court or tribunal proceedings which have not been stayed (adjourned or put on hold).

Responsibility for the policy

21 Responsibility for the effective implementation of the External Persons Complaints Policy lies with the Head of Complaints.

Monitoring and review of the policy

22 Responsibility for reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of the External Persons Complaints Policy lies initially with the Head of Complaints. Formal responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of this provision lies with the Academic Board.

Version history

Version	Amended by	Revision summary	Date
V1.0	Drafting team – chaired by Head of Complaints	Initial drafting	30/05/14
V1.1	QA team – chaired by Centre Director, Bristol	QA	04/07/14
V1.2	External Consultant	External Review	31/07/14
V1.3	Review Group: VP (AGQS), Academic Registrar, Director: Education and Quality, Head of Quality Assurance	Coherence	05/08/14
V1.4	Executive Management Board	Approval	13/08/14
V1.5	Proof Reader	Proofing	11/09/14
V1.6	Academic Board	Approval	19/09/14
V1.7	Academic Registry	Review	16/07/15
V2.0	Vice Provost – External and Academic Development	QA group	20/08/15
V2.1	Academic Board	Approval	10/02/16
V2.2	Academic Registry	Review	20/07/17
V2.3	Review group and other stakeholders	Revised to align with published QAA advice and guidance	06/09/19
V2.4	Registry Officer	Change to the document coding convention	March 2020

V2.5	Senior Quality Officer	Further naming convention clarifications	26/03/2020
V2.6	Head of Quality Assurance	Minor grammatical corrections	14/12/2020
V2.6	Head of Apprenticeship of Compliance and Operations	Review to ensure appropriate alignment with apprenticeship provision	17/12/2021