

## **Student Complaint Procedure – Guidance for Students**

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### **Who can make a complaint?**

If you are a current student, a prospective student who has accepted an offer of a place to study here, or a graduate who has left the University in the last three months, you are entitled to make a complaint through the Student Complaint Procedure.

If you are studying for an award of the Arts University Bournemouth which is delivered at a partner institution you should refer to the approved policy of the institution at which you are registered. If you have completed that institution's complaints procedure but remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you may refer your complaint to the Review stage of the AUB Student Complaint Procedure.

If you are studying at AUB for an award of a partner institution you can make use of this Complaint Procedure. If, following the Review stage, you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you may refer your complaint to the final stage of the complaint procedure of your awarding partner institution.

There is a separate complaint procedure for applicants who have not been offered a place at AUB.

AUB does not accept complaints from parents or other third parties. If you wish another person to act as your representative in making a complaint, you should provide a signed written statement naming your representative, and give permission for the University to share all relevant information with them.

### **When can I make a complaint?**

You should make a formal complaint within 6 months of the cause of your complaint, or within 3 months if you have left the University. Arts University Bournemouth will not accept formal complaints that fall outside of these timescales unless you can provide evidence that you were materially prevented from submitting a complaint more promptly.

### **What if it is a group complaint?**

A group of students can submit a group complaint as long as everyone in the group is complaining about the same issue.

To make a group complaint, all students should sign a letter and attach this to the Student Complaint Form. You should appoint one person as a spokesperson who will attend meetings and sign off the complaint on behalf of the group.

### **What type of issues are covered by the Student Complaint Procedure?**

The Student Complaint Procedure covers issues relating to your course, or to a service provided by the University. Examples might include:

- Course-related issues (e.g. timetable issues, poor quality teaching materials)
- Facilities (e.g. halls of residence, poor teaching areas)
- Services (e.g. Student Services, the Library, refectory)

Although you may submit a complaint regarding the conduct of a member of staff (e.g. inappropriate behaviour, discrimination), this is not the same as a personal grievance. The University is responsible for responding to your complaint and ensuring that your circumstances are addressed; if your complaint leads to disciplinary action against a member of staff, you may not be informed of this.

## **What issues are not covered by the Student Complaint Procedure?**

The Student Complaint Procedure does not cover any issue relating to an academic assessment or award; this is dealt with specifically under AUB's Appeals Policy. Matters of academic judgement are not grounds for complaint.

Complaints about other students are dealt with through AUB's Student Disciplinary Policy.

Complaints about the Students' Union are dealt with through AUB Students' Union complaints process. If you have completed the Students' Union's complaints procedure but remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you may refer your complaint to the Review stage of the AUB Student Complaint Procedure.

If you submit a formal complaint but it becomes clear that your case should be considered under one of the above policies, you will be referred to the relevant policy and staff member; you will not have to re-submit your complaint.

## **Who will know that I have made a complaint?**

If your complaint is about a member of staff, they will normally be informed – this is so that the issues you have raised can be investigated or responded to (but see below). Details of your formal complaint will be shared as part of the investigation to allow the Senior Investigating Officer to gather evidence which will help them make a judgement about your complaint.

For example, if you complain that your tutor shouted at you in a teaching session, the investigator will need to assess whether or not this is the case. As part of their investigation, they will need to share your name with the tutor, to ask for their views. They may also interview other students who were present, telling them that a complaint has been received, and asking if they can recall the tutor shouting at anyone.

When your complaint is formally closed, a copy of the investigation report will be shared with the relevant course leader or head of service, so that any recommendations can be actioned.

## **Data protection**

In submitting a formal complaint, you will be providing information and documentation to support your case. You should be aware of the implications of this with regards to data protection. Your documentation will only be accessed by AUB staff who are directly involved in the consideration of your complaint. It will be held in a secure electronic file; any supporting evidence provided in hard copy will be stored securely by the Senior Investigating Officer. Information you provide may be provided to a member of the vice Chancellor Executive team (or nominee) if your complaint is reviewed. Following the conclusion of your complaint, all documentation will be held for the period specified within the University's Retention Policy.

If you wish to submit evidence concerning a third party, you must ask their permission and inform them how the information will be held. You should include a statement from this third party giving permission for the information to be used as part of your complaint.

## **Can I make an anonymous complaint?**

You can request that your complaint remain anonymous, but you should be aware that it may not be possible to investigate the issues you have raised sufficiently to make a judgement.

Remember that the purpose of a complaint is to resolve an issue, or make sure that it doesn't happen again – if you don't want anyone to know about your complaint, it will be very hard to change things for the better.

## **If I'm complaining about an individual member of staff, will I have to talk to the person I'm complaining about?**

By far the best way of resolving a complaint is to do so informally through Early Resolution, simply by telling the person why you are upset. The person may be completely unaware that they have upset you, or it may be that they can explain to you why they acted as they did. You should recognise that you have a role to play in resolving the complaint – nobody can complain for you.

The Senior Investigating Officer can offer you support and guidance in resolving any issues informally. If your complaint concerns a “personality clash” or a breakdown in the relationship with a member of staff, you will be encouraged to attend mediation.

### **What is mediation?**

Mediation is a very effective way of addressing conflict, and is particularly good at helping people to move on from conflict in a constructive and positive manner. A trained mediator will meet with you and the other party individually, then you will meet with the other party. The mediator will manage the meetings to help you both come to a successful resolution.

### **Will my grades be affected if I make a complaint?**

If you decide to make a formal complaint, the University will consider your case fairly and without prejudice; you will not be disadvantaged in any way by making a complaint.

Although it is natural to be concerned, students who have submitted complaints in the past have confirmed that their grades were not affected, and they were not treated differently as a result of complaining.

### **What should I think about before making a formal complaint?**

Before submitting a formal complaint, you should try to think objectively about the issues you are complaining about. It may be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Exactly what it is that I am complaining about? (Be specific).
- Why am I unhappy about the issue? (Think about the impact it has had on you).
- How do I think it should be – what makes me think that? (Is it that a policy hasn't been followed, or did you expect something different – were your expectations realistic?)
- What evidence is there to support my view? (Do you have any written documents, or was someone else a witness?)
- What am I hoping to achieve by making a complaint? (What would make the situation acceptable to you?)
- Is it reasonable to expect that the problem can be solved? (People's personalities can't be changed, but their behaviour can – are you willing to compromise?).

It is extremely important that you set out what you hope to achieve, and the resolution you are seeking. This will help the investigator, and the University, to be clear about how your concerns may be addressed.

### **How should I submit my complaint?**

You should always attempt to resolve any issues through Early Resolution, by speaking to the person involved. The Senior Investigating Officer can support you with this, and can accompany you in any meetings. Only if your attempts at Early Resolution are not successful should you consider making a formal complaint by completing a Student Complaint Form and submitting it to the Senior Investigating Officer. You can attach a longer letter if you wish, but if you find it hard to summarise your complaint you may want to ask yourself some of the questions above to help clarify your thoughts.

If you decide that you wish to write a longer letter, try to avoid writing a long, rambling account – the more specific you are, the clearer your complaint will be. You may wish to structure your letter like this:

- Story – briefly describe what happened, including names, dates and times if possible

- Evidence – attach any written evidence, or state if witnesses were present
- Impact – briefly state what impact this had on you
- Goals – briefly describe what you would like to happen if your complaint is upheld.

If your complaint relates to a member of staff, try to complain about the behaviour, not the person.

The Student Complaint Procedure is a formal process and you are advised to maintain your own notes throughout. You should keep a record of key dates and events, and retain copies of any relevant documentation.

### **Can someone else attend meetings with me?**

You are entitled to be accompanied by a friend or representative at all meetings; if you wish you can nominate this friend or representative to speak on your behalf.

### **How long will it take to deal with my complaint?**

The aim of the Student Complaint Procedure is to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage. Not all complaints need to go through all three stages of the procedure - the vast majority of complaints are resolved at the Early Resolution stage. The University aims to resolve all formal complaints within 90 days, although most will not take this long. The flow chart at the end of the Student Complaint Procedure gives an indication of the timescales you can expect.

### **Who can support me?**

The Senior Investigating Officer processes all student complaints and can discuss your concerns with you, and give you advice on the policy. The Students' Union is also available to provide advice and support, and may also act as an advocate.

The University recognises that making a formal complaint can be stressful and it's important that you feel supported throughout this time. The AUB Counselling and Wellbeing Services can offer you confidential support to help you manage the emotional aspects of making a complaint.

### **Is there anything else I should know?**

Don't forget, the most effective way of raising and addressing any matter which is causing you concern is to discuss it directly with the person involved on an informal basis. Arts University Bournemouth expects the majority of complaints to be resolved in this way.

If you have any further questions about making a formal complaint, the Senior Investigating Officer will be happy to advise you.