

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Name of procedure :	Complaints Procedure
Purpose of procedure :	To provide details of the processes for making a complaint against the University and its staff.
Approval for this procedure given by :	Academic Board
Responsibility for its update :	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar
Procedure applies to :	Current or previous students of the University or anyone seeking or receiving a service from the University or anyone who is affected by its activities
Date of Approval :	29 June 2011
Proposed Date of Review :	May 2012

1. Introduction

Staffordshire University is committed to monitoring and evaluating its services to enhance their quality and ensure that they meet the standards outlined in our Student Charter and other appropriate policies and regulations.

We welcome feedback and comments on the services we provide. We have a suggestion scheme to enable students, other customers and members of our local community to make a contribution to the future development and improvement of University services, processes and facilities. Copies can be obtained from the Information Centres, Faculty/School and Services Offices and the Students' Union Advice Centres.

All complaints are given full consideration and you will not be disadvantaged for making a genuine complaint. The University expects that complainants will not engage in frivolous or vexatious complaints. Where a complainant fails to provide reasonable evidence to substantiate their allegations, the University

reserves the right not to progress the complaint further. Students who do submit frivolous or vexatious complaints may be subject to Student Disciplinary Proceedings.

The University also expects that a complainant, or representative, will pursue any complaint in a proper manner which is compatible with the Student Behaviour Policy. Should the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar consider that a complainant is pursuing a complaint in a manner which is contrary to the Student Behaviour Policy, the University reserves the right to invoke the Student Disciplinary Procedure or terminate the complaint investigation.

The University also has in place a variety of mechanisms to ensure that students, in particular, have the opportunity to take part in the decision making processes of the University at award, Faculty/School and institutional levels and we hope and expect that students will take full advantage of these in making their views known.

Regular student feedback is also gathered through a variety of questionnaires and surveys that help us to use our resources in the best way possible to meet student needs.

We recognise that there may be occasions when these information and feedback mechanisms are not sufficient to deal with problems that may occur from time to time. For this reason we have introduced a formal complaints procedure to ensure that your complaints and comments are dealt with in a speedy and professional way. Every complaint is looked at in a positive manner to help us monitor and improve our services.

The complaints procedure aims to:

- be easily accessible
- resolve complaints informally at local level wherever possible
- allows speedy handling, with established time frames for action
- ensure a full and fair investigation
- respect complainants' desire for confidentiality wherever possible
- provide an effective response and appropriate redress
- feed back into University systems to ensure that services are improved

2. Frivolous or vexatious complaints

What is a frivolous or vexatious complaint?

A frivolous or vexatious complaint can be characterised in a number of ways:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- Insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- Insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;

- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance;
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

We understand that if a student contacts us with what they believe is a complaint, then it is a complaint to them, whatever others might think. We are sensitive to the fact that if the student raises the same or similar issues repeatedly despite receiving a full response, there may be underlying reasons for this persistence. Deciding whether a request is frivolous or vexatious is a flexible balancing exercise, taking into account all the circumstances of the case. There is no rigid test or definition, and it will often be easy to recognise. Our main consideration will be the issues raised in the complaint rather than the behaviour of the student bring the complaint.

What if we decide that a complaint is frivolous and vexatious?

If we decide that a complaint is frivolous or vexatious, we will write to the complainant explaining that we are terminating our consideration of the complaint under rule 3 of the Complaint under rule 3 of the Complaints Procedure. We will give reasons for our decision. If the complainant wishes to appeal against our decision, he or she can do so by writing to the University Secretary. The University Secretary will review the information on the file, including any representations the complainant has made, and will decide whether to confirm the decision that the complaint is frivolous or vexatious, or to reopen our review.

2. What Is A Complaint?

The complaints procedure covers any expression of dissatisfaction about:

- standards of service
- actions or lack of actions by the University or its staff
- provisions of the University affecting individuals, students, customers or clients of any group
- incidents which are defined as being any form of abuse, harassment or bullying including those related to gender, race, physical abilities, sexual orientation, religion or age.

The complaints procedure does **NOT** cover:

- requests for new or different services or provision
- review of examination boards decisions (appeals) and review of extenuating circumstances decisions
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/rev_of_exam_board_tcm44-26765.pdf
- students' union procedures <http://www.staffsunion.com>
- disciplinary procedures
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/student_disciplinary_tcm44-26980.pdf
- staff grievance procedures
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/internal/grievance_tcm44-26220.pdf

These are covered by separate policies and procedures, details of which can be found on the attached links or in the Information Centres, Faculty/School Offices, Services Offices and Libraries and are contained in the General Regulations for Students or from Personnel for staff grievances.

However, if having considered your complaint, the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar believes that it should be considered in accordance with the Procedure for Review of an Examination Board Decision, your complaint will be re-classified and you will be notified of this.

3. Who Can Complain?

- current or previous students (studying at Staffordshire University within the last 12 months), individually or in a group
- anyone seeking or receiving a service from the University or anyone who is affected by the activities of the University. We do accept complaints from third parties.

We regret that we cannot take any action on anonymous complaints or complaints raised on behalf of an anonymous third party.

4. Before You Complain

- please think about using our suggestions of feedback mechanisms
- talk to us informally about levels of service – sometimes we are constrained by external policy decisions or resources in what services we can provide
- if you are a student, talk to staff in the Students' Union Advice Centre

5. If You Decide To Complain

The University will:

- handle your complaint in a quick, polite and straightforward way
- investigate your complaint thoroughly and impartially
- inform you of when you can expect a reply at all stages of the process
- ensure that students, in particular, are not disadvantaged in any way by reason of raising the complaint.

6. How, Where and To Whom To Complain

Stage 1 (Informal)

We try to resolve any complaint informally at the point at which the problem arose. Many apparent concerns arise from misunderstandings that can quickly be resolved by talking through the matter. If possible you should firstly:

- telephone the appropriate member of staff

Or

- call in and see the appropriate member of staff. An appointment is advised to ensure that you are seen promptly

Or

- write a letter to the appropriate member of staff

If you wish to complain about your treatment by a specific individual, you should try to approach this person in the first instance.

If you would rather talk informally with the Faculty/School Student Guidance Advisor, please do so. S/he will listen to your complaint and liaise with the Faculty or School concerned to try to resolve the issues informally. Your request will be dealt with as promptly as possible.

Alternatively, you can discuss the matter with a senior member of staff within the Faculty/School or Service office to which your complaint is related. Please contact the Faculty/School/Service office for more information.

If the source of your complaint is a matter of University policy or practice, please try to identify the relevant person to contact from the list at the end of this document. The Student Guidance Officers in the Student Office or the Student Advice Centre in the Students' Union can offer you advice also.

Stage 2 (Formal)

If you feel unable to approach the Faculty/School or Service directly involved in your complaint, or you consider that the matter has not been satisfactorily resolved, you should complete a Complaints Form (Form C1) available from the Information Centres, Faculty/School Offices, Service Offices and Libraries. You should try to complete the form within 15 working days of the incident giving rise to the complaint. You should indicate on the form what remedy you are seeking as a result of your complaint. The Student Advice Centre in the Students' Union will be pleased to offer you advice in completing the form.

The completed complaints form should then be forwarded to the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar, either by post or by emailing appeals-complaints@staffs.ac.uk, who will acknowledge its receipt and will investigate your complaint with the appropriate Faculty/School Dean or Director of Service. The Faculty/School Dean or Director of Service has the right to meet with and interview any person referred to in the complaint in reaching their decision. In addition, if the complaint refers to the actions and/or behaviour of an individual, that individual will have the right to be interviewed in order to respond to such allegations or submit a written statement. If your complaint is about the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar, please send it to the University Secretary.

A response will normally be sent to you within 20 working days. If the complaint is likely to take longer than this to investigate, we will keep you informed of progress on a regular basis. If your complaint is upheld, our response will let you know what action the University intends to take, for example a formal apology, a statement on how systems will be changed in the future, a referral to a Faculty/School or Service to re-examine their procedures.

If you are unhappy with the response to your complaint, you will have the opportunity to request an informal meeting with the Dean or Director of Service

(or nominee). You must do so by writing to the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar within 7 working days of receiving the decision. You will be given at least 5 working days notice of the meeting. You may be accompanied by a Students' Union representative or fellow student. The Dean of Students and Academic Registrar, or nominee, will also attend the meeting. A brief written summary will be sent to you within 5 working days of the meeting.

Stage 3

If you remain dissatisfied with the response to your complaint after the informal meeting, you can request that your complaint is considered by the Complaints Review Panel. You should submit details in writing of your reasons for wishing to take the complaint to the next stage to the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar. This should normally be done within 10 days of receipt of the response from Stage 2. The Dean of Students and Academic Registrar will acknowledge receipt of your request and convene a meeting of the Complaints Review Panel (see Section 10 for more details) normally within 30 working days of receipt of your request. You are not permitted to introduce new issues at this stage of the procedure.

The panel will have access to all prior correspondence and the results of the initial investigation. They will also normally wish to meet with all parties involved in the complaint in reaching their decision.

The decision of the Complaints Review Panel is the final stage of the University's complaints procedures.

7. Students on Distance Learning awards and those studying at Partner Colleges in the UK and overseas

It is recognised that attendance at a hearing or interview in the University might be problematic for students on distance learning awards or studying at Partner Colleges in the UK or overseas.

Such students will therefore be given the opportunity to:

- attend a hearing or interview in the University OR
- attend a hearing or interview in one of the University's Partner Colleges with the permission of that Partner College. Video conferencing of such a hearing or interview will be considered where appropriate OR
- respond by correspondence to an identified member of staff in the University in accordance with the particular stage of these procedures. It is expected that this will be the norm.

In all such cases, the timescales for replying to students and requiring replies from students will need to be adjusted. However, both the student and the University will be expected to fulfill their respective responsibilities within a reasonable timeframe.

8. Confidentiality

As far as is practicable, confidentiality shall be preserved in the investigation of a complaint. Such an approach is in the interest of both the complainant and any individual members of staff involved. If however you name another person in your complaint, we believe that normally they should know what is said about them and who is making the complaint. The University may also take action if a complaint is found to be malicious or vexatious.

9. Disabled Students

We take our responsibilities to disabled students seriously. If you need us to make adjustments in order that you can attend a hearing or interview, please let us know in advance and we will aim to meet your individual needs. This could mean us relocating the hearing to a more accessible venue and/or making arrangements for a communicator or advocate to be present at the hearing. To enable us to do this, please contact Dean of Students and Academic Registrar on 01782 294960, or email a.j.birch@staffs.ac.uk at least 7 days before the hearing.

10. Equality and Diversity

Staffordshire University is committed to ensuring that anyone who studies, works at or interacts with the University will experience a culture of openness in which everyone is valued equally and respected.

We will not tolerate any individual being subjected to abuse, harassment or bullying particularly because of their gender, race, physical abilities, sexual orientation, religion or age.

If you have been subjected to abuse, harassment or bullying for any reason, please inform us and we will endeavour to act upon your request.

11. Who To Contact For Advice

Dean of Students and Academic Registrar, Winton Square, Stoke campus, extension 4960 or email: appeals-complaints@staffs.ac.uk

University Secretary, Stafford campus, extension 3211 or email: k.b.g.sproston@staffs.ac.uk

Students' Union Advice Centre, Stoke campus, extension 4629

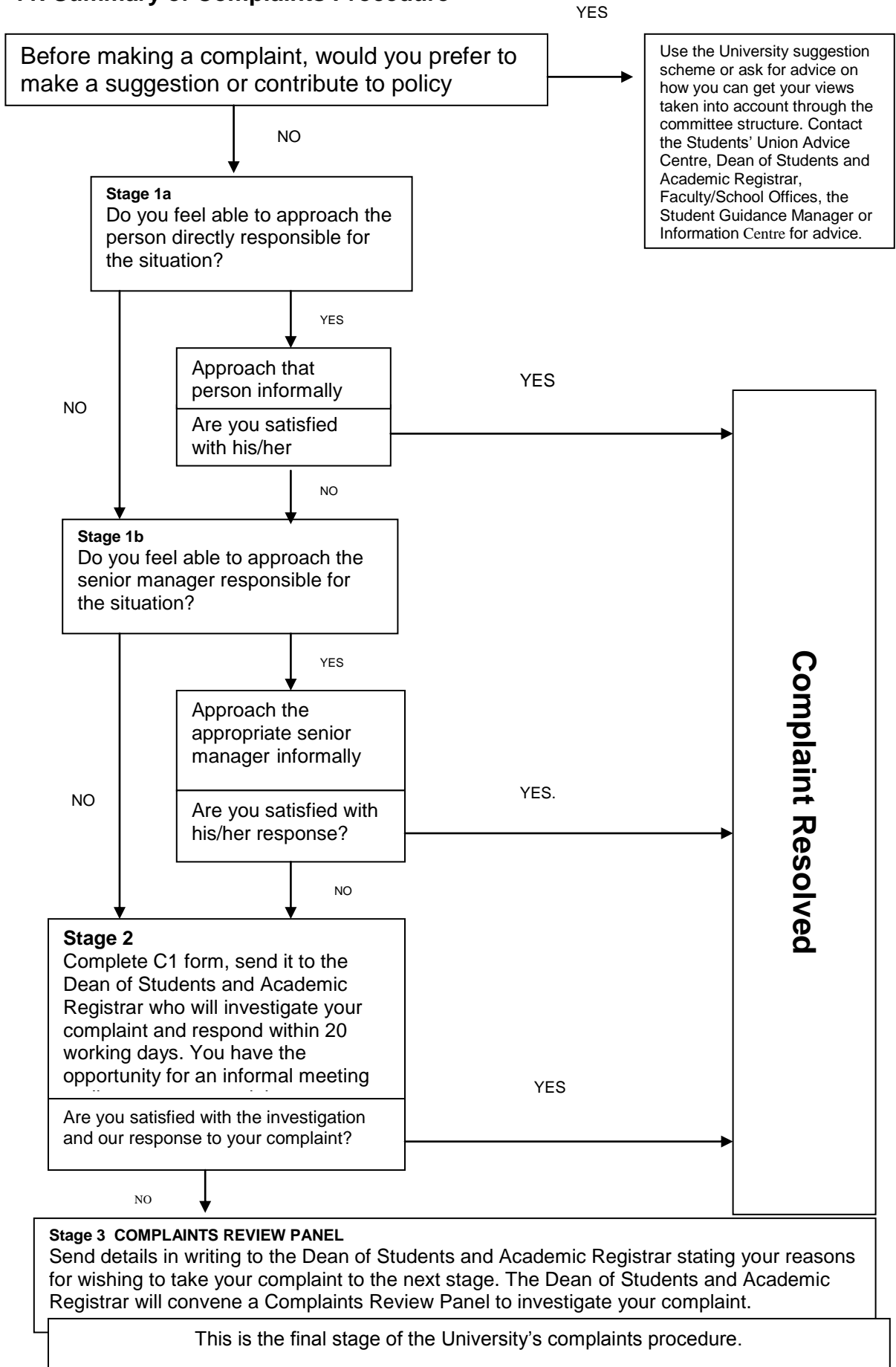
Students' Union Advice Centre, Stafford campus, extension 3311

University Guidance Officer, Stoke campus, extension 2768

Equality and Diversity Team (in relation to hate incidents), extension 2775

A full list of Deans and Directors of Service is given at the end of this document.

11. Summary of Complaints Procedure



12. Complaints Review Panel

If you remain dissatisfied with the response from the initial investigation you can request that your complaint is considered by the Complaints Review Panel. You should submit details in writing of your reasons for wishing to take the complaint to the next stage together. This should normally be done within 10 working days of receipt of the response to Stage 2. You are advised to consult with the Students' Union Advice Centre, your personal tutor, or other member of University staff before you submit your written request. We will acknowledge receipt of your request and convene a meeting of the Complaints Review Panel normally within 30 days.

The panel will have access to all prior correspondence and the results of the initial investigation. The panel has the right to meet with and interview any person referred to in the complaint in reaching their decision. In addition, if the complaint refers to the actions and/or behaviour of an individual, that individual will have the right to appear before the panel to respond to such allegations or submit a written statement. If you are a current or previous student of the University you have the right to be accompanied by a representative of the Students' Union or a fellow student. The University will pay reasonable, standard rate travel expenses incurred as a result of your attendance at the hearing. The right to be represented also applies to any individual who is the subject of a complaint.

You will normally receive written confirmation of the Panel's conclusions and any subsequent action that the University intends to take within 5 working days of the end of the hearing. The outcome of the hearing will be kept alongside other relevant papers in the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar's office.

The decision of the Complaints Review Panel is the final stage of the University's complaints procedure.

Membership of the Complaints Review Panel

- A member of the University Executive Team (Chair)
- A member of the Board of Governors with no connection to the complainant.
- Executive Pro Vice Chancellor, Dean or Director of Service not implicated in the complaint, appointed by the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar.
- President of the Students' Union or nominee
- An independent person appointed by the Vice-Chancellor from a panel of independent persons approved from time to time by the Board of Governors.

The Secretary to the Review Panel shall be the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar or nominee.

13. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

Staffordshire University is a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's complaints handling scheme. If you have completed all the stages

of the University's Complaints Procedure, but remain dissatisfied with the University's response to your complaint, you may apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education at the following address:

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
Third Floor
Kings Reach
38-50 Kings Road
Reading
RG1 3AA
Tel: 0118 959 9813
Email: enquiries@oiahe.org.uk

Scheme Application Forms, and guidance on how to apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, are available from the University Information Centres at Stafford and Stoke campuses. Alternatively, you can access the OIA website via the University's online Complaints Procedure.

Area of work or policy	Informal Contact	Senior Manager responsible	Other ways of letting us know your comments/relevant committees
Learning environment: Course delivery and/or supervision	module tutor, course leader	Faculty/School Dean	Course Committees, Student Academic Representatives, Faculty/School Boards
Learning resources and study support	Faculty/School staff, Information Services staff	Faculty/School Dean or Director of Information Services	Library suggestion scheme, Course Committees
Computing equipment	Faculty/School technicians or Information Services staff	Faculty/School Dean or Director of Information Services	
Equal Opportunities: General Issues and hate incidents	course leader, personal tutor, Students' Union officers, Equality and Diversity Team	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	Diversity Committee
Harassment and bullying	Equality and Diversity Team	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
Admissions Procedures: General issues	course admissions tutor, Head of Student Recruitment	Director of Sales and Student Recruitment	Recruitment Management Team
Disabled Students	course admissions tutor, Head of Student Recruitment, Head of Student Enabling Centre	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
University Services: Careers Counselling Multi Faith Chaplaincy Student Enabling Centre Nursery Student health services)) individual staff member from within the service or) Head of the relevant Service)	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
Accommodation	Accommodation office staff or Accommodation Manager	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
Catering	Commercial Services staff	Head of Commercial Services	
Sport and Recreation	Sports centre staff	Head of Commercial Services	

Administration:

Modular undergraduate awards	Faculty/School Office, Director of Information Centre	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
Modular Masters awards	Faculty/School Office, Director of Information Centre	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
Admissions	Student Recruitment staff, Head of Student Recruitment	Director of Sales and Student Recruitment	Recruitment Management Team
Examinations and awards	Student Administrative Services staff, Director of Information Centre	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
Student records, grants, loans	Student Administrative Services staff, Director of Information Centre	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
Invoices for tuition fees or accommodation fees	Head of Income	Deputy Finance Director	
Research student administration	Research Administration staff	Director of Academic Policy	
External Activities			
Regional Office	Enterprise and Commercial Development staff	Director of Enterprise and Commercial Development	
Marketing	Marketing staff	Head of Marketing	
Press and PR	Head of Press and PR	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	
SURF	SURF Office	Director of Educational Partnerships	
Campus and Buildings:			
Student residences	Director of Estates	Financial Director	
General University buildings	Director of Estates	Financial Director	
Health and safety issues	Health and Safety Officer, Director of Estates	Financial Director	Health & Safety Committee
Students' Union	Students' Union officers	Union President	Students' Union General Meetings
Other related procedures			
Assessment/examination appeals	Course leader, Students' Union Advice Centre, Student Guidance Officer	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	
Student disciplinary procedure	Faculty/School Office or Student Guidance Officer	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	University Secretary

Executive Team

Professor Michael Gunn, Vice-Chancellor
Paul Richards, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Ken Sproston, University Secretary
Neil Scott, Financial Director
Ian Blachford, Director of Human Resources
Rosy Crehan, Executive Pro Vice-Chancellor

Deans and Directors of Service

Professor Mike Goodwin Dean, Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Technology, Stafford campus
Hilary Jones, Dean, Faculty of Health, Stafford campus
Professor David White, Acting Dean, Faculty of Sciences, Stoke campus
Dr Astrid Herhoffer, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Media and Design, Stoke campus
Professor Susan Foreman, Dean, Business School, Stoke campus
Rosemary Evans, Dean, Law School, Leek Road
Karen Snaith, Head of Personnel, Cadman Building, Stoke campus
Paul Taylor, Director of Estates, Federation House, Stoke campus
Dean of Students and Academic Registrar, Stoke campus
John Franklin, Director of Information Centre, Stoke campus
Mary Hulford, Director of Quality Improvement Unit, Stoke campus
Bernard Shaw, Director of Information Services, Stoke campus
Dr Steve Wyn Williams, Director of the Academic Policy, Blackheath Lane
Deborah Cooke, Head of Strategic Marketing, Stoke campus
Vacancy, Director of Sales and Student Recruitment
Linda Burgess, Head of Student Recruitment, Cadman Building, Stoke campus
Chris Slade, Director of Educational Partnerships, Blackheath Lane
Sandra Booth, Director of Enterprise and Commercial Development, Blackheath Lane
Charles Manners, Director of Commercial Services

Staffordshire University's commitment to equality and diversity means that this policy has been screened in relation to the use of gender-neutral language, jargon-free plain English, recognition of the needs of disabled people, promotion of the positive duty in relation to race and disability and avoidance of stereotypes. This document is available in alternative formats on request. If you think we can improve the fairness of this policy, please contact the individual who has responsibility for its update.

Mixed - White/Asian
Mixed – White/Black Caribbean
Other Black background
Other mixed background
White British White Irish White Scottish White
Prefer not to say

Your religion/belief (please circle one):

Buddhist Christian Hindu Jewish Muslim
Rastafarian Sikh Other No religion Prefer not to say

Your sexual orientation (please circle one):

Heterosexual Bisexual Gay/lesbian Prefer not to say

OFFICIAL USE ONLY

Complaint received by Dean of Students/ Academic Registrar on: _____

Acknowledgement card sent on: _____

Forwarded to: _____ Date _____

Acknowledged by: _____ Date _____

Action Taken _____
