

## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

<b>Name of procedure :</b>	Complaints Procedure
<b>Purpose of procedure :</b>	To provide details of the processes for making a complaint against the University and its staff.
<b>Approval for this procedure given by :</b>	Academic Board
<b>Responsibility for its update :</b>	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar
<b>Procedure applies to :</b>	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
<b>Date of Approval :</b>	24 June 2009
<b>Proposed Date of Review :</b>	May 2010

### **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 Student Advice Centres.

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. 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)
- review of extenuating circumstances decisions
- students' union procedures
- disciplinary procedures
- staff grievance procedures

These are covered by separate policies and procedures, details of which can be found on the University's Web pages, 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 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 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 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 20 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 Francesca Francis, Dean of Students and Academic Registrar on 01782 294960, or email [f.francis@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:f.francis@staffs.ac.uk) within 7 days of 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: [f.francis@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:f.francis@staffs.ac.uk)

University Secretary, Blackheath Lane, Stafford campus, extension 3211 or email: [k.b.g.sproston@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:k.b.g.sproston@staffs.ac.uk)

Students' Union Advice Centre, Stoke campus, extension 4629

Students' Union Advice Centre, Stafford campus, extension 3311

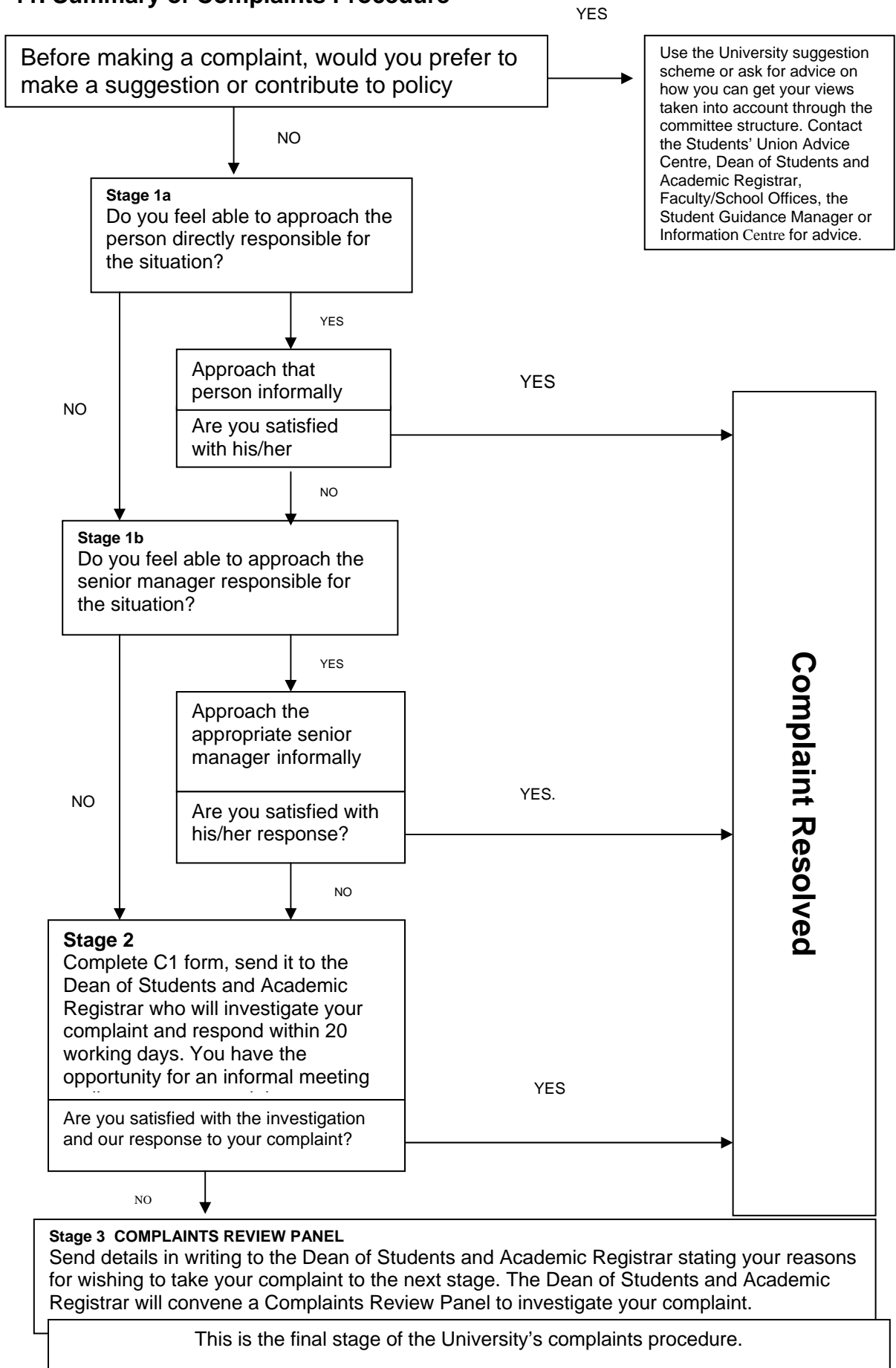
Student Guidance Officer, Stoke campus, extension 2768

Student Guidance Officer, Stafford campus, extension 3749

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.
- A 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  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Thames Tower  
Station Road  
Reading  
RG1 1LX  
Tel: 01189 599813  
Email: [enquiries@oiahe.org.uk](mailto: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.

<b>Area of work or policy</b>	<b>Informal Contact</b>	<b>Senior Manager responsible</b>	<b>Other ways of letting us know your comments/relevant committees</b>
<b>Learning environment:</b> 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	
<b>Equal Opportunities:</b> 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	
<b>Admissions Procedures:</b> 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 Disability Students Centre	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar	Disability Forum
<b>University Services:</b> Careers Counselling Multi Faith Chaplaincy Disabled Students 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	Head of Hospitality and Leisure Services	
Catering	Residential Services staff	Head of Hospitality and Leisure Services	
Sport and Recreation	Sports centre staff	Head of Hospitality and Leisure Services	
<b>Administration:</b> Modular undergraduate	Faculty/School Office,	Dean of Students and	

awards	Director of Information Centre	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	
<b>External Activities</b> 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	University Secretary	
SURF	SURF Office	Director of Educational Partnerships	
<b>Campus and Buildings:</b> Student residences	Head of Hospitality and Leisure Services	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
<b>Students' Union</b>	Students' Union officers	Union President	Students' Union General Meetings
<b>Other related procedures</b> 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 Christine King, Vice-Chancellor  
Paul Richards, Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
Ken Sproston, University Secretary  
Neil Scott, Financial Director  
Gill Howland, Executive Pro Vice-Chancellor  
Ian Blachford, Director of Human Resources

## **Pro Vice-Chancellors, Deans and Directors of Service**

Dr Teeranlall Ramgopal, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Blackheath Lane  
Professor Mike Goodwin Dean, Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Technology, Stafford campus  
Hilary Jones, Dean, Faculty of Health, Stafford campus  
Dr Ruth Green, Dean, Faculty of Sciences, Stoke campus  
Ann Parry, 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  
Alistair King, Head of Hospitality and Leisure Services, Federation House, Stoke campus  
Francesca Francis, Dean of Students and Academic Registrar, Stoke campus  
John Franklin, Director of Information Centre, Stoke campus  
Mary Furness, 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 Marketing, Stoke campus  
Cathy Gilbert, Director of Sales and Student Recruitment, Blackheath Lane  
Linda Burgess, Head of Student Recruitment, Cadman Building, Stoke campus  
David Jenkins, Director of Educational Partnerships, Blackheath Lane  
Sandra Booth, Director of Enterprise and Commercial Development, Blackheath Lane

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

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