**Submitting a Complaint – Research Programmes**

**Student Guidance (August 2023)**

**Introduction**

This guidance must be read in conjunction with the Student Complaint Procedure as detailed in Annexe 4 (Research Programmes) of the [Handbook of Student Regulations](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/handbook).

If after reading this guidance alongside the regulations, you still have questions about the procedure, please email studentappealsandcomplaints@northumbria.ac.uk. If you would like independent advice and guidance about submitting a complaint, please contact the Students’ Union at [www.mynsu.co.uk/advice-centre/your-course](http://www.mynsu.co.uk/advice-centre/your-course).

Students may complain if they are dissatisfied with how they have been treated or with a service or facilities provided by the University. Dissatisfaction with programme delivery or supervision should be raised as a complaint.

**Key Points**

1. Students should informally raise issues of complaint as soon as possible so that appropriate action can be taken. Students can do this by speaking to the staff member most directly involved.
2. Because of the particular nature of research degree programmes, it may sometimes be more appropriate that an Independent PGR Counsellor be involved.
3. If you are unable to resolve the issue informally and believe you have grounds for a formal complaint, you must raise your formal complaint **within 10 working days of any informal outcome and within 3 months of the alleged event(s) about which you are complaining**.
4. If your complaint is late, you must provide and evidence a compelling reason for the lateness of the complaint. Without this, your complaint will be considered no further.
5. If your complaint is a group complaint, all members of the group need to sign an agreed statement of concerns and the outcome sought by you all when you lodge the complaint.
6. If your complaint is that your experience differed from what the University undertook to provide, or what you might have reasonably expected, please explain as clearly as possible in what way your expectations were not met.
7. Complaints based on a questioning of academic judgement are not permitted. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) defines academic judgement as “*a judgment that is made about a matter where the opinion of an academic expert is essential*” ([OIA Scheme Rules](https://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/2276/oia-rules-april-2018.pdf), 2018).
8. Students will not be disadvantaged as a consequence of having made a complaint (whatever the outcome). If appropriate, the University will make arrangements to assure you that you will not be disadvantaged as a result of lodging a complaint.
9. Throughout the complaints process students may be accompanied by a ‘Friend’, as defined in Appendix A of the [Handbook of Student Regulations](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/handbook). Upon occasion, and with the agreement of all the parties concerned, students may be represented by that Friend.
10. Before submitting your formal complaint, check that you have supplied the following documentation:
	1. A [Student Complaint Form](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/handbook)
	2. All supporting evidence
11. Organise your information carefully, ensuring that you clearly cross reference your arguments with the supporting evidence supplied by you. Do not repeat or copy and paste arguments made in your email, complaint form, and covering letter as this only delays the University’s ability to assess the information.
12. If your formal complaint relates solely to a specialist service such as I.T., Accommodation, or Student Life and Wellbeing, your complaint will be considered by a manager from this specialist service. Otherwise, your complaint will be considered by the Student Casework Team (as.studentcaseworkteam@northumbria.ac.uk).
13. Most complaints are Category A Complaints and will normally be considered within **30 working days**. If there is to be any delay, the complaint handler will ensure you are kept informed.
14. If your complaint is potentially a Category B complaint, one which is of a sensitive nature such as an allegation of sexual misconduct, bullying or harassment, discrimination, or other serious misconduct, your case will be passed to an Independent Manager to determine whether the evidence available supports grounds for a formal investigation under staff management procedures. The complexity of these cases will affect the University’s ability to respond within the standard 30 days, but the complaint handler will ensure you are kept informed.
15. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint and believe you have grounds, you may request a review of the decision within 10 working days of your Stage 2 decision being issued. See Appendix G of the [Handbook of Student Regulations](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/handbook) for further guidance about requesting a review.
16. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint and do not have grounds to request a review, you may request a Completion of Procedures Letter to enable you to take your case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). See Appendix H of the [Handbook of Student Regulations](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/handbook) for further guidance on taking your case to the OIA.