

## Student Complaints Management Procedure

*Printed copies are for reference only. Please refer to the electronic copy in the Policy and Procedure Manager (PPM), the electronic policy management system (EPMS), to ensure you are referring to the latest version.*

### Policy Supported:

Complaints Management Policy

### Audience:

Staff, Students

### Preamble:

Murdoch University aims to offer an excellent experience to its students through our courses of study, services and facilities but we recognise that occasionally things go wrong. This procedure explains how students can make a complaint. The procedure can be used by students for both individual and collective complaints. It is expected that the student(s) concerned will pursue the complaint personally; complaints submitted by a third party will not normally be accepted (although students may seek help in lodging their complaint). The University will treat complaints seriously and will deal with them fairly and objectively.

### Objectives:

There are no objectives.

### Definitions:

*Any defined terms below are specific to this document. The definition of common terms appears in the Murdoch University Dictionary of Terms.*

### Implementation Steps:

- i. Complaints should be brought forward by students as soon as possible after the events or actions (or lack of actions) which have prompted the complaint. A delay may impact on the ability of the University to resolve the complaint or provide the best outcome. Students are expected to raise any concerns informally in the first instance. Only if the informal stage has been exhausted and the student remains dissatisfied should the formal stage of the procedure be initiated<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> However, where the seriousness of the complaints warrants, the University may allow the complaint to progress directly to the formal stage.

- ii. Every reasonable effort will be made to resolve a complaint satisfactorily, in a professional, fair and transparent manner. If a complaint is upheld, or the complaint results in a decision or recommendation in favour of a student, the University will provide an appropriate response, immediately commence implementation of the decision or recommendation and/or take preventative action, correct any mistakes or misunderstandings as far as possible and as soon as practical and will take any other action deemed appropriate. The student will be informed of any action taken. If a complaint is not upheld then detailed reasons for that decision will be provided in writing to the student.
- iii. While it is preferable that the complainant is identified, an anonymous complaint may be accepted and investigated if:
  - a. It is deemed to be of a serious nature;
  - b. It contains or points to good evidence of misconduct, error or some other significant institutional flaw; or
  - c. So required by law.
- iv. Students are advised that while best efforts will be made it may not be possible to achieve a resolution or to properly investigate a complaint that is lodged anonymously or where the student wishes to have their identity protected during the complaint management process.
- v. A student who does not provide contact details may not be able to be advised of the outcome of the complaint management process.
- vi. An anonymous complaint may be sent via the Murdoch University website to [UniversitySecretary@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:UniversitySecretary@murdoch.edu.au) or by mail addressed to the University Secretary, Murdoch University, 90 South Street, Murdoch WA 6150, Australia.
- vii. International students are advised that, while best efforts will be made, it may not be possible to achieve a resolution or to properly investigate a complaint that involves the University's education agents and/or any related party the University has an arrangement with to deliver courses or related services. The University will however always respond to such complaints.

### **Scope:**

- i. This procedure is designed to encompass the following:
  - a. Complaints from students concerning their experience related to an Academic College, an Administrative or Support Service or general publicity about the University.
  - b. Complaints from students concerning the arrangements for teaching or the arrangements for assessments.
  - c. Complaints from international students concerning their dealings with the University's education agents and/or any related party the University has an arrangement with to deliver courses or related services.
- ii. The procedure does not cover the following, for which separate procedures exist:
  - a. Academic appeals relating to decisions made as a part of admissions, progression or assessment processes ([Student Appeals Policy](#)).

- b. Complaints involving an allegation of misconduct by a student ([Student Discipline Procedure](#)).
- c. Complaints arising in the context of graduate research enrolment ([Graduate Research Degrees Dispute Resolution Procedure](#)).

### **Implementation Steps:**

There are three possible stages through which a complaint may progress:

- i. Informal Stage
- ii. Formal Stage
- iii. External Review

#### **1. Informal Stage**

- 1.1. Many complaints can be resolved informally and a complaint will ideally be dealt with as close as possible to the point at which it arises. Students who wish to complain should, therefore, initially discuss the matter with those directly responsible.
- 1.2. The list below highlights those members of staff who should be approached by a student to seek an informal resolution of their complaint:
  - 1.1.1. Complaints relating to a Unit should be raised with the relevant Unit Coordinator or Academic Chair.
  - 1.1.2. Complaints relating to staff in a College should be raised with the relevant Dean Academic Operations (where the complaint is against the Dean Academic Operations, the Pro Vice Chancellor should be addressed)<sup>2</sup>.
  - 1.1.3. Complaints about one of the University's administrative or support services should be raised with the relevant manager.
  - 1.1.4. Complaints about the arrangements for students studying in one of Murdoch University's offshore campuses in Singapore should be raised with the Singapore Dean.
  - 1.1.5. Complaints about the arrangements for students studying in Dubai should be raised with Dean Dubai.
  - 1.1.6. Complaints about information provided by the University should be raised with the Director Marketing and Communications.
- 1.3. If students are unhappy to approach the person identified above, another appropriate member of staff or the Guild of Students may be approached for support.
- 1.4. Staff investigating complaints at this stage should, if possible, have a face-to-face or telephone discussion with the student concerned, to come to an

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<sup>2</sup> The Dean Academic Operations (or PVC) will liaise with the People and Culture Office as appropriate.

understanding of the exact nature of the student's dissatisfaction and to explore what outcome the student seeks.

- 1.5. Wherever possible, student complaints should be resolved at this local level, without the need to resort to formal proceedings. A student should normally expect to receive a written or verbal acknowledgement within five (5) working days and a full response within fifteen (15) working days of receipt of the complaint.

## **2. Formal Stage**

- 2.1. If the student is not satisfied with the response at the informal stage, they may initiate a formal complaint in writing by email to [UniversitySecretary@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:UniversitySecretary@murdoch.edu.au) or by mail addressed to the University Secretary, Murdoch University, 90 South Street, Murdoch WA 6150, Australia. The University Secretary will determine who is the most appropriate senior member of staff within the University to deal with the complaint.
- 2.2. The senior members of staff, to whom complaints may be forwarded by the University Secretary, are listed below:
  - 2.2.1. Complaints about an Academic College will be dealt with by the College Pro Vice Chancellor or, if the College Pro Vice Chancellor has previously been involved, the Provost<sup>3</sup>.
  - 2.2.2. Complaints about the Student Village will be dealt with by the Director, Student and Library Services.
  - 2.2.3. Complaints about student services, student processes or student information about the University will be dealt with by the Director, Student and Library Services.
  - 2.2.4. Other complaints will be forwarded to the senior member of staff who in the opinion of the University Secretary is the most appropriate person to deal with them.
  - 2.2.5. Complaints from an International student concerning their dealings with the University's education agents and/or any related party the University has an arrangement with to deliver courses or services will be managed by the Pro Vice Chancellor International. Depending on the source of the complaint, the Pro Vice Chancellor International may forward the complaint to the relevant education agent or related party.
- 2.3. If a complaint involves any of the officers listed in 2.2.1 to 2.2.3, or if the University Secretary considers there otherwise to be any conflict of interest, they will identify an appropriate alternate.
- 2.4. The officer to whom the formal complaint is forwarded may either investigate the matter themselves or delegate responsibility to another member of staff of appropriate standing and background to undertake the investigation on their behalf.

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<sup>3</sup> Where the complaint involves allegations of misconduct by a staff member, the People and Culture Office must be consulted.

- 2.5. Students are asked to complete the Complaints Form (attached). The information to be given on the Complaint Form is to include:
- a. Contact details for the student making the complaint;
  - b. Details of the complaint;
  - c. A statement of the action already taken to try to resolve the complaint informally and why the response given is considered unsatisfactory; and
  - d. What resolution the student wants.

However, if the University Secretary determines that sufficient information has been given in the text of the email or letter submitted then the complaint will be accepted without the need to complete a Complaints Form.

- 2.6. The University Secretary will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and forward the complaint to a senior member of staff appointed to deal with the complaint within five (5) working days of receipt of the complaint.
- 2.7. The senior member of staff appointed to deal with the formal complaint will commence the assessment of the complaint within five (5) working days from receipt of the complaint. The senior member of staff will attempt resolution of the complaint by a means appropriate to its nature and circumstance. Such means may include:
- 2.7.1. Correspondence between the parties;
  - 2.7.2. Negotiation with the student or with appropriate members of staff or with both;
  - 2.7.3. Facilitation of a conciliation meeting between the student and staff concerned; or
  - 2.7.4. If both parties agree, referral for mediation.
- 2.8. The senior staff member will ensure the student is given an opportunity to formally present their case at minimal or no cost and be accompanied and assisted by a support person who is not a qualified legal practitioner at any relevant meetings.
- 2.9. The outcome of the complaint will be finalised as soon as practicable. It is expected that the formal procedure should normally be completed and a written response covering detailed reasons for the outcome sent to the student within six (6) weeks of the receipt of the complaint by the University Secretary. The possible outcomes include:
- 2.9.1. A resolution, reached between those involved following mediation if appropriate.
  - 2.9.2. If the complaint is upheld, recommendations to the relevant authority within the University on how the issues identified in the complaint might be addressed including, if applicable, appropriate redress to the student.
  - 2.9.3. Dismissal of the complaint with detailed reasons given to the student in writing.

- 2.9.4. A copy of the letter to the complainant informing them of the outcome of their complaint will be lodged with the University Secretary.
- 2.9.5. That the complaint is forwarded to the relevant external body who has jurisdiction to manage the complaint (such as in the case of a complaint from an International student about the University's education agents and/or any related party the University has an arrangement with to deliver courses or services.
- 2.10. The University Secretary's Office will keep a written record of the complaint, including a statement of the outcome and reasons for the outcome.

### **3. External Review**

- 3.1. If the student is not successful in the University's complaints process, the University Secretary's Office will advise the student within 10 working days of concluding the review of the student's right to access an external complaints handling and appeals process. The University Secretary's Office will give the student the contact details of the appropriate complaints handling and external appeals body. More information is at <http://our.murdoch.edu.au/University-Secretarys-Office/Governance-Services/External-avenues/>.

#### **Performance Indicators:**

There are no performance indicators.

#### **Related Documents:**

[Staff Code of Conduct](#)

[Student Code of Conduct](#)

[Student Appeals Policy](#)

## References:

Customer satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organisations (ISO 10002:2004, MOD) Australian Standard

*Good Practice Guide for Handling Complaints and Appeals in Australian Universities*, Jackson, Fleming, Kamvounias, Varnham, Australian Learning & Teaching Council, May 2009 (ISBN 978-0-9807355-3-6)

NSW Ombudsman – Complaints Handling at Universities: Best Practice Guidelines, December 2006.

Australian Universities in Court: The Causes, Costs and Consequences of Increasing Litigation, Hilary Astor.

Improving Dispute Resolution in Australian Universities: Options for the future, Hilary Astor (Sydney University, NSW, Australia)

Grievance Handling in Australian Universities: the case of the university ombudsman and the dean of students, Anita Stuhmcke (University of Technology, Sydney, Australia)

## Approval and Implementation:

<b>Approval Authority:</b>	University Secretary
<b>Responsible Officer(s):</b>	University Secretary
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	University Secretary

## Revision History:

Approved/ Amended/ Rescinded	Date Approved	Effective Date	Next Review Date	Resolution No. (if applicable)
Approved by Vice Chancellor	10/06/2020		31/07/2020	
Approved by Acting VC	20/06/2019		31/07/2020	
Approved by AC	12/03/2019		31/07/2020	AC/16/2019(ii)
Administrative amendment	19/03/2019		31/07/2020	
Approved by Acting VC	28/07/2018		31/07/2020	
Approved by Acting VC	31/07/2017		31/07/2020	
Approved by Vice Chancellor	06/05/2016		30/05/2019	
Approved by Vice Chancellor	19/08/2014		19/08/2017	