

Complaints to the University

Information for Undergraduate and Postgraduate students. This leaflet should be read in conjunction with the University's Student Complaints Procedure:

https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/stdserv/Master_copy_-_Student_Complaints_Procedure.pdf

What is an academic complaint?

Students can put in a complaint to the University relating to:

- The delivery of teaching;
- Support services;
- Administration;
- Facilities;
- Other aspects of the student's relationship with the University.

If the issue you want to complain about falls outside of these areas, then it may not fall into the scope of the Student Complaints Procedure. Speak to an Adviser if you are unclear as to which university procedure your issue might fall under.

There are usually three stages to the Student Complaints Procedure. Unless there is good reason for doing so, a student may not progress their complaint to a higher stage unless all lower stages have been completed.

Time limit for raising a complaint

A complaint will normally only be accepted for consideration if it is informally raised (at stage 0) by a student **within one calendar month** of the issue occurring. If a student has not been able to raise their issue within this timeframe then the University will consider whether the student has a good reason for delay.

Things to be aware of

- Any student who makes a complaint in good faith should not be negatively affected by the fact that they have made a complaint, regardless of the outcome.
- A group of students can raise a joint complaint.
- Generally, it's in the best interest of both the student and the University to resolve a complaint at stage 0, the least formal and lowest stage possible.
- Complaints cannot always remain confidential. Details of a complaint may be discussed with relevant staff members so that a full investigation can be carried out.
- A complaint made anonymously will only be considered under exceptional circumstances.
- Complaints relating to academic judgement will not be considered.
- If you are invited to any meetings to discuss the complaint, you can be accompanied by a 'friend' who can be: a RUSU Adviser, a RUSU Student Officer, a current University of Reading student or member of staff.
- If you need any reasonable adjustments to help you engage with the process, the University should be able to provide these for you.
- Students are expected to maintain good conduct during the procedure. If the University encounters any unacceptable behaviour from students, they have the right to terminate the consideration of complaint. You can read more about this in the [University's procedures for dealing with frivolous and vexatious complaints in appeal of results and student complaints](#).

Stage 0 Complaint (informal stage)

This is an informal complaint/correspondence raised directly with the relevant staff in the school or service, either verbally or via email.

Submitting your Stage 0 complaint

The Advice Service always encourages students to submit their stage 0 complaint via email so there is a written log of the complaint being submitted. Within your email you should:

- **Be specific:** Within the complaint, try to be as detailed as possible about the issue.
- **Create a timeline:** It can often help to create a timeline of events to help you ensure that you are explaining what has happened clearly and in an order that makes sense.
- **Evidence your complaint:** Make sure to submit any relevant evidence relating to the issue you have experienced alongside your email.
- **Request to meet:** having a meeting with the relevant staff member can help you to explain the basis for your complaint in more depth.
- **Request a realistic outcome:** Be clear and informed about the outcome you are seeking from the complaint.

You should submit the complaint to the person responsible for the area, for example the Head of School or Head of the relevant student service. If you are unsure of who to submit the complaint to, ask a RUSU Adviser or contact the Student Complaints Officer (studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk) for further guidance.

Stage 0 process

An acknowledgement of the complaint should be sent to you, and the relevant staff member should arrange to promptly meet with you (if you request this) to discuss the complaint. Once a meeting has taken place and where reasonable (or requested by you) the staff member should send you a written outcome of stage 0 within 5 working days.

Stage 0 outcomes

Potential outcomes from stage 0 might include: (a) a solution to the issue; (b) an explanation of why a suggested outcome isn't possible; (c) an apology; (d) the University might tell you that it's not appropriate for your issue to be considered informally and might direct you to submit a formal stage 1 complaint.

Once you receive a complaint response you will be given information on how to escalate the complaint if you are not happy with the outcome. We recommend you discuss the complaint outcome with a RUSU Adviser in the first instance; the Adviser will help you to explore the next steps available to you and the different potential outcomes.

NB: If you are dissatisfied with the stage 0 outcome and want to make a formal complaint, or if the University has told you it is not appropriate to consider your issue informally, you will need to submit a stage 1 complaint form within five working days of receiving the stage 0 outcome.

Stage 1 Complaint (formal stage)

Hopefully your complaint can be resolved informally at stage 0 and you will not need to move on to stage 1. However, if you remain dissatisfied with the complaint response you receive at stage 0 you can escalate the complaint to stage 1 which is a formal complaint. You may submit a stage 1 complaint form if:

- You are not satisfied with the outcome of stage 0;
- You have received no response from staff at stage 0 despite repeated efforts;
- The University has told you that it is not appropriate to consider your issue informally and has directed you to submit a stage 1 complaint form.

Submitting your Stage 1 complaint form

To submit a stage 1 complaint you will need to complete a **stage 1 complaint form** (*download it here:* http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/qualitysupport/Complaint_Form_-_Stage_1.docx) and submit it to the studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk using your University email address.

Please ask a RUSU Adviser if you would like advice and guidance on filling in your stage 1 complaint form.

A stage 1 complaint form will only be considered if it is received **within 5 working days** from receiving the stage 0 outcome, or **within 5 working days** from being informed that the issue isn't suitable for informal consideration.

Stage 1 process

Your complaint should normally be acknowledged by the Student Complaints & Discipline Officer within 3 working days. The stage 1 complaint will then be referred to the staff member responsible for the area where the complaint arose, who will allocate your complaint to a staff member who has had no previous involvement in the matter to investigate.

Normally, the staff member investigating the complaint will offer to meet with you to discuss your complaint in more depth. You have the right to be accompanied by a 'friend' to this meeting who can be: a RUSU Adviser, a RUSU Student Officer, a current University of Reading student or member of staff. Another member of staff will minute the meeting and you should receive a copy of the minutes afterwards.

A full response to your stage 1 complaint should be sent to you **within 20 working days** of submission unless further investigation is required, in which case you should be told the likely timescales.

Stage 1 outcomes

You should receive a stage 1 outcome letter and a copy of the investigation report from the Student Complaints Officer. The stage 1 outcome letter should include: the procedure(s) followed; the conclusions; a recommendation to resolve the complaint where appropriate; and information on how to escalate the complaint where appropriate.

We recommend you discuss the complaint outcome with a RUSU Adviser in the first instance; the Adviser will help you explore the next steps available to you and the different potential outcomes.

NB: If you are dissatisfied with the stage 1 outcome and want to request a review, you should submit a stage 2 complaint form within five working days of receiving the stage 1 outcome.

Stage 2 Complaint (review stage)

If you are dissatisfied with the stage 1 outcome and / or investigation process, you can ask for a review of the complaint to be carried out. Please be aware that Stage 2 cannot usually review points which were not raised in your original stage 1 complaint, unless there is good reason why it was not raised earlier. This is because stage 2 is the process of reviewing whether the complaint was dealt with correctly, it is not the role of stage 2 to respond to new complaint information.

Submitting your Stage 2 complaint form

To submit a stage 2 complaint you will need to complete a **stage 2 complaint form** (*download it here:* <https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/stdserv/Complaint-Form-Stage-2.pdf>) and submit it to studentcomplaints@reading.ac.uk using your University email address.

Please ask a RUSU Adviser if you would like advice and guidance on filling in your stage 2 complaint form. A stage 2 complaint form will only be considered if it is received **within 5 working days** from receiving the stage 1 outcome.

Stage 2 process

The University Secretary (or their nominee) will review the complaint to decide:

- Whether the stage 1 outcome was reasonable;
- Whether the relevant procedures were followed;
- Whether you have been provided with clear reasons for the stage 1 outcome.

They may also consider any new information that the student was unable to provide for a valid reasons earlier in the process and / or consult appropriate members of staff to determine a suitable resolution for the complaint. If the University Secretary has been involved earlier in the complaint process, then an alternative senior member of University staff will conduct stage 2 instead.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor will issue the University's formal stage 2 response **within 30 working days** of submission of the stage 2 complaint, unless delay is unavoidable, in which case you should be told the likely timescales.

Stage 2 outcomes

You should receive a stage 2 complaint response in the form of a 'Completion of Procedures' letter, which indicates that you have now completed the University's internal procedures in relation to your complaint. We recommend you discuss your complaint outcome with a RUSU Adviser; who will be able to offer guidance on the different options available to you.

NB: If you are dissatisfied with the stage 2 outcome and want to take your complaint to the OIA, you should submit an OIA complaint form within 12 months of date on the 'Completion of Procedures' letter



After Stage 2: The OIA

If you have exhausted the University's Student Complaints Procedure but are not satisfied with the stage 2 outcome, then you may choose to take your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), an independent body set up to review individual complaints made by students against higher education providers in England and Wales.

A RUSU Adviser can provide advice and assistance in raising a complaint to the OIA.

Please be aware it is extremely unlikely that the OIA will view your complaint until you have been through the entire University Student Complaints Procedure. You will be expected to have a 'Completion of Procedures' letter from the University, and the OIA will ask you to provide this as evidence.

The OIA can review complaints and the way in which the University has handled a complaint. Further information about the OIA can be found on their website: www.oiahe.org.uk

If you would like further advice or to speak with somebody in person then a Students' Union Adviser may be able to help. The specialist advisers offer a confidential service, independent from the University so they can discuss your case with you in private.

Contact us by email at advice@rusu.co.uk, or visit us in the RUSU building.

You can book an appointment or attend a drop-in session. Drop in runs on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday (11:00 - 13.30) and Wednesday (14:00 -16.30).