

Appendix A to the Student Complaints Policy and Procedures

Procedure for Student Complaints in the Event of Major Disruption

Context

In the event of major disruption such as a natural disaster, pandemic or industrial action, the University will make all reasonable efforts to minimise the impact on students. However, the University recognises that the number of student complaints may increase following a period of major disruption and may be different in nature to complaints during business as usual. The University will be guided by its commitment to students to resolve complaints as quickly as possible with a focus on minimising disruption to students' studies. The University recognises that where events impact on students' access to learning material or on assessments, academic measures may be needed to resolve the complaint and ensure minimal impact on students' experience. This procedure therefore links to the Procedures for Protecting the Interests of Students in the Event of Major Disruption set out in Annexe 2 to Appendix D of the Code of Practice on Assessment.

The Senior Leadership Team will decide when an event, or series of events constitute major disruption to the institution or a part of the institution and when the major disruption should be considered to be over, and will inform Deans and Heads of Operations, who will disseminate the information. Once a period of major disruption has been declared, initial complaints relating to the impact of the major disruption may be dealt with using this expedited procedure. The Senior Leadership Team will decide when the effects of a period of major disruption have ended and will declare that this procedure should no longer be used.

Principles

- Complaints which are not related to the impact of the major disruption will continue to be dealt with using the standard complaints procedure.
- Complaints which relate to the impact of major disruption on students' studies may be considered using an amended process to minimise any disadvantage to students due to that major disruption.
- Action will be taken as quickly as possible to minimise any ongoing disadvantage to students. However, in recognition of the potential scale of issues resulting from major disruption there will be no specified timescales for this procedure but it would be anticipated that an outcome would usually be agreed within 28 calendar days. It should also be noted that it may take longer than usual to respond to complaints relating to other matters received during this time.

Purpose of amended procedure

- To minimise the impact of major disruption on students and to provide consistent responses to complaints about the impact of major disruption.

- To provide appropriate solutions to minimise any academic disadvantage to students as a result of major disruption so as to reduce assessment appeals at a later stage.

Scope of amended procedure

This procedure applies to taught students on modules which have been directly impacted by major disruption, for example sustained lack of staff availability to teach or sustained lack of access to facilities as a consequence of which:

1. Replacement learning material has not been provided
2. Assessment deadlines fall within the period of major disruption and rely on material which has not been taught as a result of the disruption.
3. Students can demonstrate that supervision for dissertations, final year projects or similar has not been offered at the agreed level.
4. Where there is an academic impact which falls outside the scope of 1-3 above but which has a similar impact on a student's learning, the Head of Department should carefully consider whether the impact is similar to the impacts set out in 1-3 above and seek advice from the Student Conduct, Complaints and Compliance Team before deciding not to accept a complaint under this amended procedure.

Complaints relating to the delivery of Professional Services will not be considered under this procedure but will be considered using the standard Student Complaints Procedure.

Similar principles may be applied to complaints from Postgraduate Research Students relating to major disruption.

Informal Resolution

As with all complaints, students should first attempt to secure informal resolution to their complaint. Stage One complaints will not be considered unless informal resolution has been sought. The University has in place procedures to record teaching and learning activities which are affected during a period of major disruption and the planned mitigation to replace learning materials or provide alternative learning support and will inform students of the planned mitigation. Students should be aware that due to the nature of major disruption, it may take time to speak to relevant staff and agree appropriate arrangements for replacing learning material. School Offices will make every effort to ensure that students are kept informed about the likely timescales for receiving information about the plans for replacement learning activities.

During a period of major disruption, it is the responsibility of the Head of Department to ensure that accurate records are kept of all teaching and learning activities which have been affected. The Head of Department will speak to relevant staff members as soon as possible to agree when and how replacement learning materials/ experiences will be made available. The Head of Department will inform the School Office who will communicate this to all affected students.

If replacement learning material is not made available in time for the assessment deadline but will be made available at a later date, the Head of Department will extend the assessment deadline by an appropriate length of time for all affected students. If this is not possible the matter will be referred to the Board of Examiners to determine appropriate measures to ensure that student attainment and progression is not unduly affected.

If dissertation students have not received the appropriate level of supervision, the Head of Department will extend the deadline by an appropriate length of time for all students with that supervisor. If this is not possible the matter will be referred to the Board of Examiners to determine appropriate measures to ensure that student attainment and progression is not unduly affected.

Procedure

- Students wishing to complain about a matter relating to major disruption may submit the complaint on the usual Stage One Complaint Form to the Dean via the Head of Operations. The student should clearly state the following at the top of the form, "*This complaint relates to the impact of major disruption on my studies*". The student should also clearly indicate which of the grounds 1-4 above apply to their complaint. Complaints must be submitted within 28 calendar days of the disruption occurring.
- Students who wish to use the standard complaints procedure should submit the Stage One Complaint as usual without any statement about the impact of major disruption; students who choose to use the standard procedure should be aware that this may take longer than this amended procedure.
- If a Head of Department considers that the complaint could be dealt with under this expedited procedure they may inform the student and ask them whether they wish to use this expedited procedure.
- Where a complaint made by one student is applicable to a particular group or cohort of students, only one student from the affected group or cohort needs to make a complaint. If the Head of Department has already received a complaint in relation to a group or cohort of students all subsequent complainants will be informed of this and that communication of the outcome will be made to all affected students.
- The Head of Department will confirm that the activity was affected by the major disruption, when replacement learning material should have been made available, when it was made available, and when this was in relation to relevant assessments deadlines or number of supervision sessions missed.
- If it is clear that students have been disadvantaged, the Head of Department will ensure that all students on module are offered the same remedy.
- The Head of Department will not necessarily offer to meet with students making a complaint under this amended procedure.
- If learning material is not made available within agreed timescales, the Head of Department will confirm with a relevant staff member when the learning material will be replaced and will inform students of this.
- If it is not possible to replace the learning opportunity, the matter will be referred to the Board of Examiners to determine appropriate measures to ensure that student attainment and progression is not unduly affected.
- If a student believes that an extension to a deadline as a result of the impact of major disruption is not reasonable, e.g. it creates substantial bunching of deadlines, the student can request an amended deadline using this process. The Head of Department should consult with the Board of Examiners to confirm the last possible deadline for submission of assessed work to enable students to progress. The Head of Department's response should explain the reasons for this clearly to students.

- Where a student complaint made under this procedure is found to be justified, the Head of Department will ensure that an extenuating circumstances claim is submitted on behalf of all affected students and will notify all affected students of this informing them that they do not need to submit individual extenuating circumstances claims.
- If these measures are taken students will not normally have grounds for an assessment appeal or for financial compensation. Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage One Complaint made under this procedure may submit a Stage Two complaint in line with the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure.

Financial Compensation

- If students are seeking financial compensation as part of a Stage 1 or 2 the complaint, the Head of Department will complete the investigation to establish the facts and enact any appropriate academic remedy. If the complaint is upheld, they will then refer the matter to the Major Disruption Complaints Panel. The Panel will be chaired by the PVC Education and consist of at least one APVC Education, one Faculty Head of Education and Student Experience (or equivalent), the Director of Student Administration and Support, the Student Conduct, Complaints and Compliance Manager and the Assistant Director of Legal Services plus any others as deemed appropriate. The panel will be convened on an as needed basis and will consider all complaints relating to major disruption that have been upheld which request financial remedy. The panel will consider the merits of each individual case, and any relevant precedents to seek to ensure an equitable approach to students from across the University. Please note, whilst every endeavour will be made to have an outcome for the complaint within 28 days, it may not be possible to receive an outcome from the panel regarding the financial compensation within this 28 day period.
- Complaints requesting financial compensation that are **not** upheld will not be referred to the Major Disruption Complaints Panel.