

NOVENA UNIVERSITY COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Purpose of the Complaints Procedure

This procedure sets out the way in which complaints made by students and members of the public can be managed at Novena University.

Novena University aims to resolve all complaints and concerns from students and members of the public in a transparent, consistent, fair, efficient, and effective manner.

The feedback received through the complaint process provides the university with opportunity and valuable insights by enabling the university to improve the experience of its students and that of members of the public.

Scope

This procedure applies to complaints made by:

- i. students of the university, including students studying with partner providers; and
- ii. members of the public, and other stakeholders.

When dealing with complaints made by members of the public, the university may make some adjustments to the procedure and processes if and as necessary as it relates to the circumstances.

NOTE: this Procedure does NOT apply to complaints made by members of staff of the University. Staff complaints are managed according to the terms set out by the Staff Disciplinary Committee.

All members of staff, when handling complaints from students or members of the public, must comply with this Procedure accordingly.

DEFINITION

Student Complaints Officer

A Student Complaint Officer under the supervision of the Dean of Students Affairs will assist students to resolve their complaints in an informal way and at the earliest possible opportunity under this Procedure. Student Complaints Officer will actively seek the advice of the Dean of Students Affairs where appropriate.

Alternative staff member

Where appropriate, a Student Complaints Officer, College Provost, Director and Head of Department may nominate a staff member from the Department or College to manage a Level 1 or 2 complaint on their behalf. The nominee will apply all applicable processes under the Complaints Policy and this Procedure.

Student Support Services

- The Dean of Students Affairs Support Service Unit supports students during the complaints process and help them to navigate their way around university legislation, policies and procedures.
- Counselling Services (under the Dean of Students Affairs) provides free and confidential counselling in a supportive and welcoming environment.
- Disability and Learning Access Unit (under the Dean of Students Affairs) provides services to students with a disability.
- The University's website includes information on personal safety among others

Confidentiality

All persons appointed or nominated that are involved during the complaint management process must maintain confidentiality and only discuss the complaint with persons on the need-to-know basis in order to assist in the resolution of the complaint. This responsibility extends to the complainant (students and staff). Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in disciplinary action.

Anonymous Complaints

If a complainant submits a complaint anonymously, the university might be limited in the actions it can take to resolve it. If the complainant does not provide contact information, the university might not be able to provide a response to the complaint.

Every complaint must be made in good faith and must include all relevant facts to assist the University to resolve it. Inappropriate language and behaviours may lead to disciplinary action. The university is committed to making a genuine attempt to resolve all complaints.

Fairness and no retribution

All parts of this procedure will be applied in a consistent and fair manner to all. The university will not tolerate retributive actions and or the victimization of a person who raises a complaint in good faith.

Timeliness of the Resolution of Complaints

All complainants should ensure they take steps to address their concerns as soon as possible. In addressing complaints, the university does not set a time limit for the making of a complaint. Each complaint should be made as promptly as possible. Most times, as time passes complaints may become very difficult to address and, in some circumstances, the university may resolve that a complaint has been submitted too late to be considered in the first place and may not act upon such complaint.

Accordingly, all complaints must relate to issues that happened during the period that a student(s) is/are enrolled with the university.

First step (for students only): informal self-managed resolution

Before making a complaint, a student is expected to try and resolve the concern directly and informally with the person or area involved, if it is reasonable and appropriate to do so. To do this, they should contact the relevant person and arrange a time to discuss the issue. This person might be the Class Representative (class Rep.), Course Adviser or their Head of Department in the first instance.

The office of the Dean of Students Affairs can help assist students to clarify their issues, prepare for informal meetings and or provide support at informal meetings.

Submitting a Complaint

Current students only:

As indicated above, as a first instance student complainants may approach the relevant staff member within their Department or College and attempt to resolve the concern informally at a local level.

If a student complainant is unable to resolve a matter informally, he/she may submit a complaint if he/she so wishes: see below

All complainants:

If a student or member of the public wishes to submit a complaint, the complaint must be in writing form (hard-copy) and submitted to the appropriate office.

The complaint must clearly set out :

- details of the concern or issues which the complainant wishes to raise, including relevant actions, dates, and persons concerned;
- what steps (if any) that the complainant has taken to attempt to resolve the concern;
- the outcome which the complainant is seeking
- all relevant documents must be attached.

Upon submitting any complaint, the student complainant will receive a receipt or signed acknowledgment indicating that such complaints have been submitted to the university. The University may in its discretion dismiss a complaint if the complaint shows any form of the following:

- is not submitted in good faith,
- is frivolous,
- is misguided,
- is malicious,

- is vexatious.

If a complainant submits a complaint relating to a matter that has already been resolved by the university, the university will not take any further action unless such complaint it is considered there is or are unresolved issues therein.

Complaint Levels

Complaints are to be categorised into three levels:

- Level 1 complaint is available to all complainants: this level is managed by Dean of Students Affairs (DSA) or an alternative nominee;
- Level 2 complaint is available to all complainants but managed by HoD/Provost or an alternative nominee; and
- Level 3 complaint is available for student complainants only: this is managed by the Students Disciplinary Committee

Level 1 complaint

Within 5 working days of the submission of a complaint, the DSA or the relevant Student will contact the complainant to confirm:

- whether the subject matter of the complaint will be considered under the Complaints Procedure;
- if so, an appropriate member of staff or DSA's representative will note that the complaint has been assigned to. If the contents in the complaint falls outside the SDC the complainant will be redirected to the appropriate area of the university to address; and
- the level of the complaint process that applies and a copy of this Procedure will be sent to the appropriate committee to deal with.

The DSA's office will attempt to resolve the complaint with the complainant. The Student DSA may take such steps that they believe may assist in resolving the issue. These steps may include but not limited to the following:

- arrange a meeting with the complainant and other individuals referred to in the complaint;
- gather information relevant to the complaint;
- refer the complaint to an appropriate staff member who can assist to resolve the complaint;
- refer the student to support services (e.g., counselling, DSA); and
- seek advice from subject matter.

Within 15 working days' period of receiving the initial complaint, the DSA's office will contact the complainant on the outcome and actions that have been agreed thus far. However, if there is any need to extend this time frame, the consent of the complainant will be sort after.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of this process, he or she may choose to escalate their complaint to Level 2.

Level 2 complaint (School or Partner Provider)

A Level 2 complaint is activated when a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome in level 1. At this point the complaint is escalated from Level 1 to level 2. Because of the particular circumstances of the case, the HoD will determine whether the complaint should be handled by the Department in the first instance.

Within 5 working days of receipt of a Level 2 complaint, the HoD will contact the complainant to confirm the person to whom the complaint has been referred for resolution (Provost or his nominee).

The Dean will attempt to resolve the complaint with the complainant. The Dean may take such steps as he/she believes may assist in resolving the concern. The steps may include:

- meeting with the complainant and or other persons referred to in the complaint;
- gathering of information relevant to the complaint;
- referring the complaint to an appropriate staff member who can assist to resolve the complaint;
- referring the student to support services (e.g., counselling, DSA staff); and
- seeking advice from subject-matter expert(s)

Within 20 working days of the Level 2 complaint being received, the Dean will contact the complainant on the outcome of the complaint, and the actions which will follow. The 20-day timeframe may only be extended with the consent of the complainant.

Request to Escalate Complaint to Level 3 (for Students Only)

If the complainant is a student, and he/she is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint in Level 2 processes, such student may request an escalation of his or her complaint to Level 3. Escalation of a complaint to Level 3 is subject to certain conditions presented herein:

- (a) that there is new, relevant evidence that was not available at Level 1 or Level 2 stages of the process, which new evidence must be described or attached to the escalation request;
- (b) that there was a failure at the Level 1 or Level 2 stages to consider evidence which was available at that time.
- (c) that there was a failure at the Level 1 or Level 2 stages to comply with other relevant Novena University policy, procedure or processes and
- (d) that there was a failure at Level 1 or Level 2 stages to apply principles of fair hearing.

At each of the levels (case), the student complainant must provide evidence or other information corroborating the grounds alleged.

The SDC will decide whether or not to accept the complaint to Level 3 which will be based upon the determination that the documentation provided by the complainant has satisfied one or more of the grounds set out in (a) – (d), above.

Within 10 working days of submission of the request to escalate the complaint to the SDC, the DSA will inform the complainant whether that request has been granted or not.

Review and Improvement on Complaint Procedure

Usually, monitoring, reporting and review of the Complaint Procedure will occur with the intent of reducing the rates of complaint instances and addressing underlying causes. The regular reporting of cases will assist with the identification of recurring complaints or any systematic issues affecting the reporting of complaints.

Responsibility

- The Vice Chancellor's reports and provides assurance to the Council (Chair by the Pro-Chancellor) that student complaints are being monitored and appropriate steps are being taken to address all underlying causes.
- The Management Committee (Chair by the VC is the Approval Authority), is responsible for approving and overseeing the implementation of this procedure.
- The Management Committee and the Registrar are responsible for the effective processing and reporting of student complaints.

Promulgation

This procedure will be communicated by:

1. Displaying (same along with all recently approved documents) on the university's website (policy page) as well as distributing hard-copies to all Provosts, Deans and Heads of Departments by the Registrar;
2. Distribution of **e-mail communication** to the Vice Chancellor, Management Team, Provosts, Deans, Heads of Departments, Directors and staff and corresponding roles within partner providers.

Complaints Records Management

Records of all complaints are held in the central university database system, the integrity of which is to be maintained by the Director of Information and Communication Technology, Dean of Students Affairs Office and the Registrar's Office in accordance with the approved Novena University brief book.