



## STUDENT COMPLAINTS

### GUIDANCE NOTES FOR STUDENTS

Revised September 2010

These notes offer guidance on what to do if you wish to make a complaint about courses or services provided by the University or about other University-related matters. They tell you who to contact and how to seek further advice. Information is available separately about other specific procedures (e.g. on harassment, academic appeals).

**More detailed guidance is available in the document entitled “Student Complaints Procedure” from Student Services, the Students’ Union or the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator.**

Please remember that circumstances are sometimes determined by factors outside the University. You will receive an explanation if this is the case. Similarly, there can sometimes be a problem because the resources available to the University are restricted – you will be told how these constraints relate to your complaint.

Student Services or the Students’ Union can advise you on the procedure for making a complaint, either informal or formal, and whether other procedures are more appropriate.

#### **Who can submit a complaint under these *Procedures*?**

These *Procedures* apply to a student or students who has/have a relationship with the University of prospective, accepted, enrolled (including dormant or suspended) or past student status.

Students who are registered for an award of the University but who are not studying at the Bolton campus of the University should consult the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator for advice **before** submitting a complaint under these *Procedures*. It is expected that the University’s partner institutions will have their own complaints procedures which students will be informed about as part of the partner’s own induction processes. The complaints procedures of the partner or the University should be used to investigate formal complaints made by students about services provided respectively by the partner or the University.

#### **Am I risking my results or services by complaining?**

No – absolutely not – if your complaint is genuine and in an acceptable form you will not be disadvantaged in any way. The University deals with complaints in an objective way so that, if necessary, it may make any corrections, improve services and redress errors.

**However, a complaint which proves to be frivolous, malicious, libelous or vexatious can jeopardise the effective use of the procedure and may not be considered. This may result in disciplinary action. A complaint may not be considered if it is in, or accompanied by, an unacceptable form of behaviour or writing.**

### **How do I make a complaint?**

Whilst we always welcome comments and suggestions about how things might be improved, we also recognise that students and others who, in the view of the University, have a **legitimate** interest in the student's complaint (**and with the written consent of the student concerned**) have a right to complain.

It is important to note that **informal resolution of a complaint should be the first option** available to the student. Some complaints can frequently be sorted out quickly by talking directly to the tutor or to the person providing the service. It is anticipated that informal resolution of a complaint will be an oral process, a written record will not be made and that the majority of complaints will be resolved informally. This informal route forms **Stage 1** of the *Student Complaints Procedure*.

If you wish to make an **informal** complaint about any aspect of the University's activities, please make contact with the relevant School/Unit of the University. If you do not know the relevant School/Unit of the University please enquire within Student Services, which is located in the Student Centre, Chancellor's Mall.

If you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint or informal resolution is not appropriate you may submit your complaint in writing to the University's **formal** complaints procedure. This forms **Stage 2** of the *Student Complaints Procedure*. At this stage your complaint will be investigated by the Director/ Head (or their nominee) of School/Service/Unit to which the complaint applies. You can expect the response to your complaint to come directly from them.

If you are not satisfied with the response from Stage 2 you may ask the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator for your complaint to be considered by the Office of the Vice Chancellor. This forms **Stage 3** of the *Student Complaints Procedure*. You can obtain guidance and advice from Student Services and/or the Students' Union.

When you have received the final University response to your complaint you will be issued with a *Completion of Procedures* letter indicating that you have exhausted the University's internal *Student Complaints Procedure*.

### **Suppose I am dissatisfied with the result of the University's internal procedures?**

Once you have been issued with a *Completion of Procedures* letter you will be able to have your complaint considered by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (the OIA). Information about the OIA will be sent to you with the

*Completion of Procedures* letter or can be obtained from Student Services, the Students' Union, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator or directly from the OIA.

If you wish to refer your complaint to the OIA you should complete the OIA Scheme application form and send it to the OIA within **three months** of receiving your *Completion of Procedures* letter.

If your complaint is wholly or partially justified, the OIA Reviewer may recommend that the University does something or refrains from doing something. The University may accept any recommendation or, if it does not, it will inform the OIA Reviewer, giving reasons.

### The main points to bear in mind are:

- Matters can frequently be sorted out quickly by talking directly to the person providing the service. **Informal resolution of the complaint should be the first option.**
- In order to be investigated properly a **formal complaint** must be submitted in writing using the *Student Complaint Record Form* signed either by the person making the complaint or on their behalf by a person who, in the view of the University has a **legitimate** interest in the student's complaint (**and with the student's written consent**).
- **However, a complaint which proves to be frivolous, malicious, libelous or vexatious can jeopardise the effective use of the procedure and may not be considered. This may result in disciplinary action. A complaint may not be considered if it is in, or accompanied by, an unacceptable form of behaviour or writing.**
- If, after reading these *Notes*, you are still unsure about how to complain, please consult staff in Student Services or the Students' Union.
- This document and the *Student Complaint Record Form* (required for the submission of a formal complaint) are available from Student Services, the Students' Union, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator, and via the University website at:

<http://www.bolton.ac.uk/Students/PoliciesProceduresRegulations/AllStudents/ComplaintsProcedure.aspx>

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator will maintain a confidential record of your complaint on the University's behalf to monitor its handling and to record the outcome and will elicit anonymous feedback from complainants on the operation of the *Student Complaints Procedures*. An annual report will highlight anonymously any major issues for the University.