



Prifysgol Cymru  
Y Drindod Dewi Sant  
**University of Wales**  
Trinity Saint David

# **PROCEDURE for POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT COMPLAINTS ABOUT SUPERVISION**

## **8.76 Procedure for Postgraduate Research Student Complaints about Supervision**

### **8.76.1 Definitions**

- (1) For the purposes of this procedure, a complaint about supervision is defined as the expression of a specific concern about the supervisory arrangements or supervision received by a postgraduate research degree student during his/her candidature. The procedure does not cover complaints against the decisions of Examining Boards or disputes with persons not employed by or subject to the jurisdiction of the University.
- (2) The term “postgraduate research student” refers to any person enrolled or registered to follow a postgraduate research degree offered by the University and persons who have been postgraduate research students of the University for up to 6 months after they have left the University. This procedure applies equally to complaints made by individual students and complaints made by groups of students.
- (3) This procedure does not apply to student complaints about the behaviour or conduct of other students. Such complaints should be raised with the Director of Student Services in the first instance.
- (4) This procedure does not apply to postgraduate research student complaints about related academic services or related support services. Such complaints are covered by the procedures for student complaints set out in Chapter 13.
- (5) In the event that a complaint relates specifically to the personal conduct of an individual member of staff such that the matter is likely to require a higher level of confidentiality than is appropriate to the Procedure for Postgraduate Research Student Complaints about Supervision, the matter shall be referred to the Human Resources Department for consideration as soon as possible. The Human Resources Department shall take forward the matter under the appropriate University procedure. In such cases, the Human Resources Department shall inform the complainant that the matter is being taken forward. For reasons of confidentiality, it may not be possible to provide the complainant with the details of the outcome of the complaint.
- (6) This procedure is designed to enable postgraduate research students to raise legitimate concerns about their supervision without fear of disadvantage or recrimination and to enable the University, in turn, to be able to investigate such concerns in full. The University is able to give formal consideration to complaints channelled through the Student Union. However, the University is unable to respond or give formal consideration to complaints by third parties in any other circumstances or to anonymous complaints under this procedure.
- (7) This procedure is intended to incorporate the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.

### **8.76.2 Informal Complaints Procedure**

- (1) Most complaints about supervision can be resolved simply and swiftly in an informal manner, at a local level, by discussing the issue or concern with the student's Director of Studies, the Faculty's / School's Director of Research Degrees, the Head of School, or the relevant Dean of Faculty. The University encourages students to raise matters of concern as soon as they arise. The University seeks, in turn, to find effective remedies to those concerns as quickly as possible and with minimum disruption.
- (2) Students who remain dissatisfied should seek remediation through the University's formal complaints procedure.

### **8.76.3 Formal Complaints Procedure**

- (1) The complaint should be raised as soon as practicable in writing on the Formal Complaint Form (Appendix GA11) and submitted to the Academic Office
- (2) The Academic Office will acknowledge receipt of the complaint normally within 5 clear working days.
- (3) In the event that a complaint relates specifically to the personal conduct of an individual member of staff, the procedures as set out in paragraph 8.76.1 (5) above will be followed.
- (4) The Academic Office shall request that the complainant authorises in writing the disclosure of the written complaint to the supervisor(s). If such authorisation is not forthcoming, the Academic Office shall explain to the complainant that the complaint cannot be taken further.
- (5) The Academic Office will forward the complaint to the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee or his/her nominee. The Chair of the Research Degrees Committee or nominee shall raise the matter with the member(s) of staff concerned and shall submit an initial report to the Academic Office within 15 clear working days which sets out the findings of the investigation undertaken by the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee or nominee and, where appropriate, makes recommendations on possible remedies to the complaint.
- (6) On receipt of the initial report from the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee or nominee, the Academic Office may request a meeting with the complainant to clarify statements made in the formal complaint and to confirm the details of the complainant's stated desired outcome. If for reasons of distance or other good reason, physical attendance in person is not possible, the complainant shall be invited to contribute via video link, audio link or to make an additional written submission. Legal representation is not allowed. On completion of the investigation a final complaint investigation report shall be produced.
- (7) The final complaint investigation report shall be submitted for consideration by the Dean of Quality and Standards who has no conflict of interest with respect to the subject of the complaint or the individuals concerned.
- (8) The final complaint investigation report will normally be submitted to the Dean of Quality and Standards within 30 clear working days of receipt of the complaint. If the final complaint investigation cannot be completed within this time period, the Dean of Quality and Standards and the complainant shall be informed accordingly and provided with an estimated completion date.
- (9) The Dean of Quality and Standards shall, upon receipt of the report, consider the findings and determine whether to uphold or reject the complaint. In giving due consideration to the complaint, the Dean of Quality and Standards shall have discretion to consult, as appropriate, with relevant colleagues.
- (10) The final decision on the complaint shall be communicated to the complainant by means of a Complaint Outcome letter (which may take the form of an electronic communication) no more than 5 clear working days after the receipt of the report. The Complaint Outcome letter should include a brief explanation of reasons for the decision and, if appropriate, details of the proposed remedy.
- (11) The Chair of the Research Degrees Committee shall also be informed of the decision of the Dean of Quality and Standards.

#### 8.76.4 Review of Complaint Outcome

- (1) On receipt of a Complaint Outcome letter, if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome or the remedy proposed, the complainant may request that the complaint outcome be reviewed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or his/her nominee.
- (2) A request for a review may only be made on one or more of the following grounds:
  - a) irregularities in the conduct of the complaints procedure, which are of such a nature as to cause reasonable doubt whether the same decision would have been reached had they not occurred;
  - b) the existence of relevant evidence and there are compelling reasons why this evidence was not provided earlier in the complaints procedure;
  - c) the complaint outcome was not reasonable given the circumstances of the case.
- (3) If the complainant does not wish to request that the complaint outcome be reviewed, the complainant may request that a Completion of Procedures letter be issued.
- (4) A request for review of the complaint outcome must be sent to the Academic Office on the Request for Review of Complaint Outcome Form (Appendix GA25) normally not later than 15 clear working days after the notification of the complaint outcome. Simple notice of a desire to request a review by a student within the above deadline shall not be deemed to constitute a formal request for review and shall not be accepted. The complainant shall provide full details of the grounds on which the request for review is being made.
- (5) If no request for review is received within 15 clear working days, the University will assume that the complainant does not wish to request a review. The complainant may request that a Completion of Procedures letter be issued.
- (6) Receipt of the request for review shall be acknowledged normally within 5 clear working days.
- (7) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee shall review the request to ascertain if the request has been made on permissible grounds and if a clear case has been made. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee may refuse any request which is not based on the grounds stated above or in which it is apparent that no clear case to review the complaint has been made. The complainant shall be informed by means of a Completion of Procedures letter that the request for review has been rejected and that the original complaint outcome stands.
- (8) If it is determined that the request has been made on permissible grounds and that a clear case for reviewing the complaint has been made, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee shall consider the request on the grounds indicated by the complainant.
- (9) In reaching a decision on the request, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee shall base his/her decision on the evidence of the complainant's submission together with any further evidence which he/she considers relevant.
- (10) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee shall be empowered to take one of the following decisions:
  - a) to uphold the original complaint outcome;
  - b) to refer the complaint back to the formal complaint procedure;
  - c) to offer a modified outcome and remedy.
- (11) The decision of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee shall be final, and the matter shall, therefore, be regarded as closed. There shall be no discussion of the decision of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee with the complainant or any other person.

- (12) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee may make recommendations for consideration by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee or Senate as appropriate on any matters arising from the consideration of appeals.
- (13) In the case of paragraph 8.76.4 (10) a) above, the decision of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee shall be communicated to the complainant by means of a Completion of Procedures letter, normally within 15 clear working days of receipt of the request for review.
- (14) In the case of paragraph 8.76.4 (10) b) above, the complainant shall be informed that the case has been referred back to the formal complaint procedure and that the procedures set out in Sections 8.76.3 (5) to (10) will be followed. There shall be no right to request a further review of the complaint outcome as set out in a revised Complaint Outcome letter issued in accordance with paragraphs 8.76.3 (10) where the case has been referred back after review by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee. On receipt of the revised Complaint Outcome letter, the complainant may request a Completion of Procedures letter.
- (15) In the case of paragraph 8.76.4 (10) c) above, the complainant shall be informed of the modified outcome and remedy by means of a Complaint Outcome letter (which may take the form of an electronic communication). There shall be no right to request a further review of the complaint outcome as set out in the revised Complaint Outcome letter. On receipt of the revised Complaint Outcome letter, the complainant may request a Completion of Procedures letter.

#### **8.76.5 Completion of Procedures and Independent Review**

- (1) The Completion of Procedure letter confirms that the internal procedures of the University in relation to the complaint have been completed. The letter will indicate whether or not a review of the complaint outcome was requested. The complainant will be advised via the Completion of Procedures letter, that he/she can take his/her complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education.
- (2) Complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education must be made within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. Full details of the procedure are available from the Academic Office or from the OIA website: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).

#### **8.76.6 Legal proceedings**

- (1) In the event of a student commencing any legal proceedings or in the event of proceedings being commenced against the complainant in relation to a complaint, the above procedures may be suspended or abandoned at the University's discretion.

#### **8.76.7 Reporting on complaints**

- (1) The Academic Office shall report annually to Senate and the Research Degrees Committee on the operation of these procedures in a form that maintains confidentiality and enables the University to reflect upon lessons learnt from students' complaints and disseminate advice accordingly.