

Complaint Handling Guide

1. Introduction

This guide outlines the steps society committees should follow when handling complaints from and about members. The goal is to ensure fair treatment, uphold expectations of behaviour, and provide appropriate support while maintaining a respectful and safe environment.

2. Complaint Handling Process

Step 1: Receiving a Complaint

- Complaints can be raised to the committee verbally or in writing. If in writing, committees may set up an online form for members to use to report incidents through.
- The reporting student¹ should describe the issue, how it has impacted them, and any resolution they seek.
- A designated committee member (typically the President, Welfare Officer, or another trusted committee member) should handle the complaint. Where a conflict of interest is present, such as the committee member is the subject of the complaint or is personally close to the Reporting/Responding Student, another relevant committee member will be designated in their stead.

Step 2: Assessment, Response, and Handling Complaints Professionally

Initial Assessment & Response Procedure

- The committee determines the level of concern based on the guide outlined in Step 3 below.
- Relevant response procedure is followed.

¹ The **reporting student** is the student who has issued the complaint.

Tips for Handling Complaints Professionally

Remain calm and neutral

Avoid taking sides and approach the conversation with an objective mindset.

Use open and non-confrontational body language

Maintain eye contact, keep an open posture, and avoid crossing arms or appearing aggressive.

Use a respectful but firm tone

Speak clearly and calmly, avoiding accusations or an overly stern tone.

Listen actively

Acknowledge the responding student's perspective, nodding and paraphrasing their points to ensure understanding.

De-escalate potential conflict

If emotions run high, suggest a short break or offer to reconvene later. Ensure you have the contact information for security and emergency services. Download the SafeZone app.

Stay solution-focussed

Guide the discussion toward constructive resolutions rather than dwelling on past actions.

Step 3: Implementing Outcomes

- If informal resolution works, the case is considered closed.
- For more serious issues, a formal warning may be taken, and SU will help determine how to proceed.
- The reporting student is updated on actions taken (without breaching confidentiality).
- Documentation of all steps taken should be kept (confidentially) for reference.

3. Levels of Concerns & Response Procedures

Level 1: Minor Concerns

Examples: Disagreements, minor misconduct, unintentional offense.

- The responding student² is informed of the complaint privately by the President and Welfare Officer (or another relevant committee member)
- Responding student is given the opportunity to share their perspective.
- They are reminded of the society's expectations and any necessary action they must take.
- If appropriate, resolution between members is encouraged, and mediation is offered to resolve disputes constructively.

Level 2: Moderate Concerns

Examples: Repeated minor issues, inappropriate language, breaches of behavioural expectations.

- Level 1 response procedures are followed.
- A verbal warning is issued that the Students' Union (SU) will be contacted if the behaviour continues.
- The issue is documented in committee records.

Level 3: Serious Concerns

Examples: Harassment, bullying, assault, discrimination, ethical breaches, a repeated level 2 infraction even after a verbal warning has been issued.

- Reporting student is referred to the SU's Complaints Procedure.
- The SU is immediately informed to provide guidance.
- Depending on the severity of the complaint and guidance from SU, the issue may be escalated to the University.

4. Providing Support to the Reporting Student

- Offer a confidential space to discuss concerns.
- Signpost them to additional support services (e.g., University Student Support Services, SU's Advice Service).

² The **responding student** is the student who the complaint is about.

- Keep them updated on the progress of their complaint (without revealing private details of the responding student's perspective).
- Ensure they feel safe within the society and provide alternative arrangements if needed.

5. Committee Roles in Handling Complaints

If any of the below individuals are involved in the complaint, an alternative committee member should take their place.

President

Oversees complaint handling, ensures procedures are followed fairly.

Welfare Officer

Primary point of contact for complaints, supports reporting students, and signposts students to support resources.

Another Committee Member (if required)

Attends meetings when a President or Welfare Officer is too close to the reporting and/or responding students or is the subject of the complaint.