

Complaints and Grievances

Self-help Resources for Students wishing to lodge a Complaint or Grievance

Sometimes things go wrong. You might want to dispute a decision, make a complaint or take action to try to get a different outcome from a university decision-making process.

The [Student Complaints and Grievances Policy](#) sets out how some kinds of complaints are managed at the University. We can help you explore possible courses of action and, if necessary, assist you through the complaints and grievance process.

These pages cover:

- [Types of grievances and complaints](#)
- [The Grievance Procedure](#)
- [Other Relevant Policies](#)
- [External Avenues](#)

If you are looking for advice on raising a grievance in relation to Subject Quality due to the impacts of COVID-19 or other reasons, head over to our [detailed advice page on this here](#).

Types of grievances and complaints

Complaints usually fall into one of the following three broad categories:

1. academic,
2. administrative, or
3. discrimination, sexual misconduct, and bullying.

Academic grievances are usually complaints or appeals against academic decisions, including:

- The procedural aspects of [assessment disputes](#);
- Selection or admission decisions;
- Content or structure of academic programs, nature of teaching, or assessment;
- Supervision issues for research degree students; and
- Issues relating to authorship and intellectual property.

Administrative grievances relate to decisions and actions associated with administrative or academic services, including:

- Administration of policies, procedures and rules by central administrative and student support groups, faculties/schools and departments;
- A decision by an administrative staff member that affects an individual or groups of students, including **special consideration decisions**;
- Incorrect advice (either written or verbal) from academic or professional staff, or in University publications, that has led to an individual or group of students experiencing some form of disadvantage;
- Access to University resources and facilities; and
- **Discrimination, sexual misconduct, and bullying**.

The Grievance Procedure

The **grievance procedure** has three stages:

1. **informal attempts at resolution**,
2. **formal grievance lodged with Academic Registrar**, and
3. **Appeals to the Academic Board**.

The process is “lock-step” - in that you need to demonstrate you have exhausted each stage before proceeding to the next. However, there are indicative timelines for each stage which means that if an attempt to resolve the problem is going nowhere or efforts to contact staff are not fruitful, then it is possible to escalate the grievance to the next stage.

Informal Resolution

The first step in to informal resolution is to approach the person directly involved in the decision or situation that you are unhappy with.

To have the best chance at a good resolution, it is essential be clear on what the key issue is and what outcome you want before contacting the relevant person. It might be useful to **contact us** first to find out what University regulations or policies apply to your situation as well as advice on how best to proceed. You might wish to review some advice on **effective communication** with the University too, to maximise your prospects of success.

Whatever you do, please be polite and respectful. There is seldom a positive outcome if you go in guns blazing, instead you may end up with a different

problem. Respectful and constructive communication is one of the best tickets to a more positive outcome, and something which will serve you well throughout life. So keep calm, and carry on.

Sometimes organising a meeting with the person can assist with resolving things quickly, as they can be a forum for discussion and collaborative problem solving. If you meet with someone to discuss any issues, take any relevant documents with you. Remember to stay calm. Address the behaviour or issue directly rather than making things personal. At the end of your discussions, summarise what you have agreed upon and confirm what options are open to you. If there is no resolution, tell the person you are dissatisfied and will seek further information.

If an agreement has been reached, it is a good idea to confirm the agreement in an email soon after the meeting.

Formal Complaints and Grievances

The formal stage of the grievance procedure involves putting your concerns in writing. We can advise you on both the structure of your submission and the content, as well as how to lodge the formal grievance. In your submission you should state what the problem is, what you have already done to resolve the problem, and what you want to happen. Stick to the facts and attach copies of relevant documents. The University should respond within five working days to acknowledge receipt of your letter, and should inform you of their decision in no more than 15 working days. You can [contact us](#) for an appropriate template to get you started, or just start with this [generic one](#). Send us your draft, and we can assist with the relevant policy references etc.

Appeal to the Academic Board

If you are unhappy with the decision regarding your formal grievance, the final recourse within the University is an [Appeal to the Academic Board](#). The determination of the appeals committee is final, and consequently it is really important to get assistance from us in drafting your appeal submission. The University sets out the process [here](#). We are also available to attend appeal hearings with you as your representative, given sufficient notice.

Other Relevant Policies

Complaints about other students' conduct at the University are covered under the University's [Student Conduct Policy](#).

Complaints about university staff behaviour may be dealt with under the University's [Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy](#).

Complaints regarding sexual harassment or assault by university staff or students come under the University's [Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy](#).

External Avenues

Once all of the University procedures for resolving grievances have been exhausted, complaints about how the grievance process was handled can be directed to the [Victorian Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman can only look at the University's procedures and the process undertaken to determine your complaint. If the Ombudsman finds errors or procedural unfairness in the University's process, then they will strongly encourage the University to review its decision. The Ombudsman cannot generally review complaints on their merits.

You can also pursue Equal Opportunity related complaints through the [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#) at any time, without needing to complete an internal process.

If you think you have a reason to lodge a formal complaint or grievance, please [contact us](#) for advice. We can assist you to understand the best way to frame your complaint against University policy, and have a range of handy templates for various types of grievances, which will help you get started.