



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

St Mary's University Twickenham

**STUDENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE
2025/26**

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Introduction

Please read these introductory notes before submitting a complaint. If you are unsure of the grounds for your complaint, or the procedures you are required to follow, you can seek advice from the Students' Union, or for advice on procedural matters by emailing complaints@stmarys.ac.uk.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) outlines that a good complaints process will be; accessible, fair, clear, independent, confidential, proportionate and timely. These elements combine to improve the student experience.

In line with the values of Respect, Excellence, Generosity of Spirit and Inclusiveness the University [St Mary's Student Charter](#) sets out the standards of service which students can expect to receive from the University and the responsibilities which students are expected to assume as members of St Mary's University.

There may be rare occasions, however, when the quality and standard of the educational experience or wider experience at the University does not meet reasonable expectations. Students may then wish to express their dissatisfaction about action or lack of action by the University, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the University. This would constitute a complaint. This can relate to both academic and non-academic matters.

Although our advice is that students try to resolve issues informally in the first instance and at the point at which the issue arises, we recognise that this is not always possible and students may wish to exercise the right to submit a complaint. In devising this Procedure, we have considered the recommendations of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, available [here](#).

Please note: For the purposes of the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure, apprentices are considered as students.

Any registered student may bring a complaint under this procedure. A former student may also bring a complaint under this procedure within 90 days after occurrence of the matters complained about, but only if the complaint could not reasonably have been brought while he or she was a registered student.

Complaints about decisions of an academic body on student progress, assessment and awards may not be brought under this procedure and may only be raised using the University [Academic Appeals Procedure](#).

This policy does not cover activities of St Mary's Student Union which, in accordance with Bye Law 13, has its own Complaints Procedure.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the policies pertaining to actions on [Harassment and Bullying](#) in the University.

1 General principles

1.1 In line with the OIA good practice framework the University aims to deal with student complaints in a manner that:

- encourages informal conciliation and resolution at a local level to the benefit of all parties where possible
- treats complaints fairly, transparently and with appropriate seriousness
- is carried out in a reasonable timescale
- allows all parties to learn from the experience
- is in line with University policies and practices
- has due regard to any applicable law
- only appropriate/necessary parties will be made aware of the nature of the complaint.

Whilst noting that there is often complex background to issues that arrive into the Student Complaints Procedure the procedure is predicated on the concept of reasonable behaviour, which in this context is based on the notion that:

- complaints will not be made for frivolous or mischievous reasons
- complaints will not be made in an offensive or abusive manner
- the stages outlined below will be followed
- complaints will be dealt with in confidence and without fear of recrimination
- a complaint which is upheld will be used to improve services.

1.2 You can only make a complaint on your own behalf. Third party complaints will not be accepted. Students may raise complaints jointly.

1.3 Anonymous complaints will not be accepted but the University has an anonymous reporting service that seeks to better understand issues and concerns where students may not wish to identify themselves. You can find it [here](#). Please note that if you choose to submit a report anonymously, the University is not able to act on any information provided, or to respond to you directly. However, by logging incidents, the information provided could help others as it may contribute to the development of University policies.

1.4 The University reserves the right to reject complaints which it judges malicious, vexatious, frivolous or which lack clear grounds for further consideration. In such cases, the reasons will be given in writing to the complainant, a copy of which will be provided to complaints@stmarys.ac.uk.

1.5 Students who make malicious complaints or repeated frivolous or vexatious complaints may be subject to disciplinary action under the Student Disciplinary Procedures.

1.6 Where complaints concern a level of service received or an academic matter, it is essential that issues are raised immediately. It should also be noted that most matters related to student progress will be handled by the Academic Appeals Procedure.

1.7 Complaints may arise over the behaviour of a member of staff or a fellow student. In considering if something constitutes a complaint it may be helpful to refer to the Harassment and Bullying policy.

1.8 Issues and concerns about your School, programme, or course, but which do not amount to a complaint should be brought to the attention of one or more of the Student Representatives on our course (details of these representatives are available via SMSU and your Programme Lead).

1.9 They can raise the matter formally at a Programme Board meeting. Alternatively, you can express your concerns through student evaluation and feedback mechanisms which each programme/course has in place for taught programmes of study, or through annual reviews for Research Students. Research Students should contact the Head of Research Services for advice.

1.10 Early and local resolution

St Mary's University is committed to the early resolution of complaints wherever possible. You must seek to resolve complaints through an appropriate member of staff (for example, your Programme Lead, Personal Tutor, Resident Mentor in a Hall of Residence, Head of School or Service, Head of Academic Student Experience, Student Services, etc.). If the matter falls outside the remit of a specific member of staff, you may seek advice on where to direct your complaint at complaints@stmarys.ac.uk.

1.11 When making a complaint, you should:

- follow the correct procedures as set out in the Student Complaints Policy
- demonstrate respect
- indicate the remedy you seek
- provide written statements on request
- where raising a joint complaint inform those with whom you are raising the complaint that you are doing so under the terms of the Student Complaints Policy;
- attend meetings about your complaint if required.

1.12 If you are a student who has a complaint about another student you should in the first instance try to resolve the situation informally by raising your concerns with your Personal Tutor or Course Lead and asking for their advice. Other options for advice include:

- Subject Leads for Student Experience offer can offer an independent perspective.
- SMSU may be able to advise you on how best to raise an issue, they can offer access to independent Advocacy Support.
- Access to Student Service support via ??? Report and Support and face to face remains available throughout.

If informal resolution does not prove possible, you will then be able to submit a Stage 1 Complaint as indicated below in Section 2.1(c). But, you should note that this Complaints Procedure is not a mechanism with which to resolve disputes between individuals.

1.13 If you believe that a criminal offence has been committed, then you can report the matter to the police. If you report the incident to the police, you can still report the incident to the University. The University may be able to take precautionary action while a police investigation is on-going.

1.14 Complaints lodged over 90 days after the act or omission complained of, or those lodged over three months after you have withdrawn or graduated will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. You should bring your exceptional circumstances - and supporting evidence of them - to the attention of the Head of Registry Services at complaints@stmarys.ac.uk.

1.15 Each Department and Service is required to keep a record of complaints received and in concluding a complaint copy in complaints@stmarys.ac.uk.

1.16 At the end of the academic year, each Institute is required to include a summary of the complaints received in their respective review processes.

The stages of the university student complaints procedure

2.1 Stage 1

2.1.1 Stage 1 of the St Mary's Student Complaints Procedure is to be followed when attempts to resolve issues or concerns informally as they arose has not proved successful.

2.1.2 Stage 1 complaints must be submitted in writing as indicated below, but there is no prescriptive form for this, and students are asked to set out their concerns either by letter or email.

2.1.3 **Programme /course-related complaints:** If you are a student on a taught programme of study, and your complaint concerns the content or delivery of your programme of study/course, or concerns academic services or facilities provided by the programme, you should submit your concerns in writing, normally to your Course Lead, (or the Personal

Tutoras appropriate). In the event that the Course Lead or Personal Tutor is the cause of the complaint it is recommended that you contact the Subject Lead for Student Experience. It is recommended that you copy complaints@stmarys.ac.uk under the title of Stage 1 Complaint.

2.1.4 An investigation will be undertaken by an appropriate staff member (appointed by the relevant Manager/Head of School or Service) who has had no previous involvement in the matter. Where possible, the investigating officer will seek to resolve the complaint within 10 working days. You may expect a written response to your Stage 1 complaint within the same 10 working days, or a written notification to advise you of the timescale in which you will receive a full response/proposed way forward. **The investigator must send a copy of the Stage 1 outcome letter to complaints@stmarys.ac.uk**

2.1.5 You should then respond in writing (directly to the person from whom you received the outcome of your Stage 1 complaint) to indicate whether or not you accept the proposed action(s) to resolve the complaint. If you do not respond within 10 working days, you will be considered to have accepted the resolution offered.

2.1.6 **Complaints concerning Services or Facilities provided centrally:** If your complaint is about a service provided centrally by the University, you are required to submit your concerns in writing to the Head or Manager of the School or Unit providing that service (please contact complaints@stmarys.ac.uk if you are unsure who to contact)

Central services or facilities are typically provided, for example, by the following:

- Admissions
- Estates and Facilities (e.g. residential maintenance, grounds, etc.)
- Finance (e.g. the administration of the collection of fees)
- Information Services (e.g. the Library, learning resources, etc.)
- Information Technology (IT infrastructure, Wi-Fi, etc.)
- Marketing (e.g. website, marketing materials, Open Days)
- Registry (e.g. academic regulations, exams, module registration, etc.)
- Research Office (support for Research students)
- Student Services (e.g. student accommodation, student funding, counselling, etc.)
- Catering (e.g. the Refectory).

2.1.7 An investigation will be undertaken by an appropriate staff member (appointed by the relevant Manager/Head of School or Service) who has had no previous involvement in the matter. The investigating officer will seek to resolve the complaint within 10 working days. You may expect a written response to your Stage 1 complaint within the same 10 working

days, or a written notification to advise you of the timescale in which you will receive a full response/proposed way forward. The investigator should send a copy of the Stage 1 outcome letter to complaints@stmarys.ac.uk

2.1.8 You must then respond in writing (directly to the person from whom you received the outcome of your Stage 1 complaint) to indicate whether or not you accept the proposed action(s) to resolve the complaint. If you do not respond within 10 working days, you will be considered to have accepted the resolution offered.

2.1.9 **Arrangements for Research Students.** If you are a Research/PhD student and your complaint concerns the provision/quality of your Supervision, or concerns academic services or facilities provided by the Academic Department or programme to support your programme, you are required to submit your concerns in writing to the Director of Research.

2.1.10 **Please note:** Research students whose concerns are not successfully resolved/concluded during Stage 1 of the Student Complaints Procedure will be given guidance as to how to progress their complaint by the Head of Research Services.

2.1.11 **Complaints concerning the behaviour or activities of another student at St Mary's:** If you are a student on a Taught programme of study and your complaint concerns the behaviour or activities of another student(s) on your course, you should engage with the Student Conduct Procedure.

2.1.15 **Complaints concerning the behaviour or activities of a member of staff (not Programme or Service related):** If your complaint concerns the behaviour or activities of a member of staff, and is not related to the content of your programme or a service provided centrally by the University, you are required to submit your concerns in writing to the Head or Manager of the department that the member(s) of staff reports to (please contact complaints@stmarys.ac.uk if you are unsure who to contact).

Wellbeing support is available to deal with any associated anxiety through Student Services email wellbeing@stmarys.ac.uk or see the [Wellbeing Service](#) webpages.

Students can also log any concerns through the University [Report and Support](#) service.

2.1.16 An investigation will be undertaken by suitably trained staff member (appointed by the relevant Manager/Head of Department) who has had no previous involvement in the matter.

2.1.17 The investigating officer will seek to resolve the complaint within 10 working days. You may expect a written response to your Stage 1 complaint within the same 10 working days, or a written notification to advise you of the timescale in which you will receive a full response/proposed way forward. The investigator should send a copy of the Stage 1 outcome letter to complaints@stmarys.ac.uk

2.1.18 You must then respond in writing (directly to the person from whom you received the outcome of your Stage 1 complaint) to indicate whether or not you accept the proposed action(s) to resolve the complaint. If you do not respond within 10 working days, you will be considered to have accepted the resolution offered.

2.1.19 Complaints concerning provision in a Partner Institution for which St Mary's is the awarding body: If you have a complaint in relation to provision in a partner institution for which St Mary's is the awarding body the expectation is that you will use the complaints procedure of the partner institution in the first instance. The Complaints Procedure of the partner will have been approved by the University as fit for purpose and the University Complaints policy would usually be used. Essentially the informal resolution stage and Stage One of this procedure are managed by partner institutions.

2.1.20 If, following completion of the Complaints Procedures by a partner institution, you are still dissatisfied, you must refer your concerns to the Academic Registrar at St Mary's (via complaints@stmarys.ac.uk), who will be able to advise you how to progress your unresolved complaint. This will sometimes be considered under Stage 2 of the St Mary's Student Complaints Procedure, and, typically, be progressed by the Head of Department in which the partner programme is located.

2.1.21 **Please note**, where any complaint in respect of such provision is judged sufficiently serious (e.g. in relation to quality or standards) the University may deem it appropriate to undertake an investigation without waiting for the results of a preliminary investigation by the partner.

2.1.22 Complaints concerning members of the Senior Management Team (SMT) of St Mary's University: If you have a complaint in relation to the conduct of a member of the Senior Management Team, you are required to submit your concerns in writing to the relevant line manager, as indicated below:

- **Vice Chancellor:** write to Chair of Board of Governors
- **Provost, Deputy Vice Chancellor, or Pro Vice Chancellor:** Vice Chancellor
- **Heads of Academic Schools / Institutes etc:** Provost
- **Directors of Professional Services departments:** Deputy Vice Chancellor

2.1.23 In all cases of complaints concerning a member of the Senior Management Team, an investigation will be undertaken by a member of the Senior Leadership Team (or member of the Board of Governors) who has had no previous involvement in the matter. The investigating officer will seek to resolve the complaint within 10 working days. You may expect a written response to your Stage 1 complaint within the same 10 working days, or a written notification to advise you of the timescale in which you will receive a full response/proposed way forward. The investigator should send a copy of the Stage 1 outcome letter to complaints@stmarys.ac.uk. You must then respond in writing (directly to

the person from whom you received the outcome of your Stage 1 complaint) to indicate whether or not you accept the proposed action(s) to resolve the complaint. If you do not respond within 10 working days, you will be considered to have accepted the resolution offered.

2.2 Stage 2

2.2.1 Stage 2 of the St Mary's Student Complaints Procedure is normally only to be followed when attempts to resolve issues or concerns under Stage 1 have proved unsuccessful and you are not satisfied with the way in which the matter has been resolved and/or with the outcome itself.

2.2.2 Stage 2 complaints must be submitted in writing on the Stage 2 Complaints Form provided at Appendix A and must also include the Stage 1 outcome decision.

2.2.3 All correspondence relating to Stage 2 of the Student Complaints Procedure should be marked "**Private and confidential**" to ensure it is only opened by the addressee.

2.3 The Stage 2 Process

2.3.1 Stage 2 complaints will be considered by a Complaints Panel, which will normally be convened by the Academic Registrar or by someone appointed by the Academic Registrar to do so. Wherever possible such a panel will be arranged to enable attendance of the student however, if you fail to attend the Stage 2 Complaints Panel without providing a satisfactory reason in advance, the Panel may proceed in your absence.

2.3.1.1 Composition of the Stage 2 Complaints Panel

A complaints panel will be chaired by a senior member of staff from a different Programme, Department or Service to that complained about. It will also contain another member of staff with no previous involvement in the matter; and a representative of the Students' Union with no previous involvement in the matter.

2.3.1.2 The Stage 2 Complaints Panel will have assistance on administrative tasks from someone appointed by the Academic Registrar. That person will inform you of the date of the meeting.

2.3.1.3 You will be invited to attend to present your case. You may have a friend, or an independent representative of the Students' Union, accompany you to provide appropriate support, guidance or representation. However, the friend may not be a lawyer or another professional acting in a professional capacity.

2.3.1.4 If you choose to present any further relevant written evidence to the Panel this must be provided at least 5 working days in advance of the hearing, unless suitable evidence can be provided to support the delay in submission of further evidence (for example, medical evidence).

2.4 The decision of the Stage 2 Complaints Panel

2.4.1 Following the conclusion of the Stage 2 Complaints Panel the Head of Department/Service or Senior Manager or nominee (as appropriate) will provide you with a written response to your Stage 2 complaint, indicating the action to be taken, where appropriate.

2.4.2 You may normally expect a written response/outcome letter to a complaint within 10 working days of the Stage 2 Complaints Panel hearing. If the Stage 2 complaint is not upheld, the outcome letter will explain the reasons. When an outcome within 10 working days is not possible, you will be informed of the likely timescale within 10 working days of the meeting with the Stage 2 Complaints Panel.

2.4.3 This will normally mark the end of the formal Complaints Procedure, and a Completion of Procedures letter can be requested.

2.5 Stage 3 (Review)

2.5.1 After the completion of Stage 2 of the St Mary's Student Complaints Procedure, it may be possible to request a review. A review will only be available on the following grounds:

1. You are able to present new information relevant to the case which could not be revealed for valid reasons or could not have been known at the time of your submission to the Stage 2 Complaints Panel.
and/or
2. You can provide evidence of procedural irregularities in the conduct of the Stage 2 procedures.
and/or
3. You can provide evidence there was bias in the Stage 2 procedures.

2.5.2 The review will not reconsider or review any evidence already considered at Stage 1 and/or Stage 2.

2.5.3 If the Stage 2 Complaints Panel upheld your complaint and/or you have accepted redress there are no grounds for a review.

2.5.4 If your complaint has not been upheld or has been only partially upheld you may feel dissatisfied. However, being dissatisfied with the outcome is not in itself a ground for a review.

2.5.5 Any review request which does not meet one or more of the three grounds set out in 2.5.1 will be refused. You will be notified of this in writing.

2.6 Stage 3 (Review) Process

2.6.1 If you believe that you meet one or more of the grounds, and you wish to request a review, you must complete and return the Review Request Form at Appendix B within 10 working days of the outcome of your Stage 2 Complaint. Completed forms and any additional evidence should be emailed to complaints@stmarys.ac.uk.

2.6.2 The Head of Registry Services, the Director of Student Operations, the Chief Operating Officer or Provost may determine if any of these grounds is present.

2.6.3 Where there are grounds, the Head of Registry Services or nominee will convene a Complaints Review Panel.

2.6.4 The Review Panel will be chaired by a member of the Senior Leadership Team and will include at least one other member of staff who has had no previous involvement in the matter. The Panel will not normally meet the student unless they deem it necessary to reach an outcome.

2.6.5 The Panel will consider the evidence you provide in the Review Request form. The Panel may uphold the decision of the Stage 2 Panel, in which case the Stage 2 outcome will stand. If they do not uphold the decision of the Stage 2 Panel, the Review Panel may issue a new outcome or make recommendations on how to resolve the complaint. The decision of the Panel will be communicated to you within 15 working days of receipt of your Review Request, or as soon as is reasonably possible. If it is not possible to issue a decision within fourteen working days, you will be notified of when you might receive a response.

2.6.6 If your complaint is about a member of the Senior Leadership Team, then the matter will be referred to the Board of Governors.

2.7 The decision of the Stage 3 Review Panel

2.7.1 The decision of the Stage 3 Review Panel will be provided to you in writing.

2.7.2 Completion of Procedures Letter and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

At this stage, a letter of Completion of Procedures will be issued by the University.

Once you have a Completion of Procedures letter from St Mary's, if you still believe that the internal complaints process has either been incorrectly conducted, or that the outcome is unreasonable in relation to the evidence, you may be eligible to raise the matter with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). Information on the process may be obtained directly from the [OIA](#) where the scope of their investigation is set out.

This Procedure should be read in conjunction with the Student Disciplinary Procedure, the Academic Appeals Procedure, the Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure, the Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure, and the Student Privacy Notice.

Escalation to the Education & Skills Funding Agency: If the student is an apprentice engaged in an apprenticeship programme delivered by the University, and they are unhappy with how their complaint has been handled under the procedures contained in this document, they can escalate their concerns to the to the Apprenticeship Service Support service provided by the ESFA on 08000 150 600 or helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk.

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