

Student Complaints Policy

16th June 2026

Version 1.1

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1.0	Amendments made to policy text to acknowledge the 'Sexual Misconduct: Student Policy and Procedure' in section 3.4, which addresses matters related to sexual harassment and to address feedback from the Executive Management Team and the Students Union	1.0
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Consultation Details		
Name	Details	Date
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	Draft sent to Students Union and Data Protection Office for feedback.	May 2023
	Draft sent to staff representative bodies for comment/feedback.	June 2023

	Policy was discussed with the Complaints Resolution Officer and the Policy Owner to identify potential amendments.	January/February 2026
	Draft presented to the Executive Management Team for feedback/approval.	April and May 2026
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Feedback or issues arising on implementation of this policy should be communicated to the policy author.

Policy Author:	Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning
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Policy Management Framework Compliance Review as requested by EMT all draft policies should be reviewed by the Policy Review Group¹ in advance of review by EMT. Please confirm that the policy was reviewed by the policy review group.

Date Policy Reviewed:	26 th May 2023
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¹ Contact susan.green@setu.ie or michelle.farrell@setu.ie

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Student Complaints Policy

1. Introduction to and purpose of the Student Complaints Policy

1.1 The purpose of the Student Complaints Policy (“the Policy”), and the procedures contained within the Policy, is to address complaints made by students that arise from perceptions of poor delivery of University services, to rectify those services as appropriate and to learn from this. The emphasis is on creating a supportive framework within which to address problems that students may encounter with the delivery of University services, to deal with them in a fair and timely manner, and to ensure that students have access to consistent and efficient procedures for the resolution of legitimate complaints/issues relating to the delivery of University services.

1.2 The procedures are designed to support students of South East Technological University (“SETU”) to raise legitimate complaints regarding the delivery of University services and have them addressed so that they may successfully pursue their studies, their academic progression and their student experience. The procedures are also designed to support the University in addressing complaints made.

1.3 A complaint under this Policy is **not**, and should not be perceived as, a personal complaint. If a staff member perceives a complaint under this Policy as being in any way personal, their Head of Department or SETU manager should affirm to them that it is not.

1.4 This Policy, and the procedures contained within the Policy, does **not** address student complaints against any staff member that may have possible disciplinary implications. Any such complaints should, in the first instance, be notified to an SETU Manager or Head of Department/Faculty/Function who will follow appropriate University HR policies and procedures.

1.5 Before progressing a complaint through this Policy, students are encouraged to firstly try to directly resolve the matter informally with the relevant service (or a representative of the service) where this is possible.

1.6 SETU is committed to effective communication of this Policy and its associated procedures and processes to students and staff members. The existence of the Policy and its associated procedures or processes will be communicated in student and staff inductions, student and staff handbooks, training courses and/or awareness initiatives, notice boards, the website and emails as appropriate. A copy of this Policy is available

on the SETU website; students and staff members are expected to make themselves aware of the Policy.

2. Glossary of terms

2.1 A 'student' under this Policy is defined as 'any person who has accepted an offer to study and is pursuing a course of study at SETU and includes any visiting student'.

2.2 A 'visiting student' is defined as 'any student who may also be bound by the terms and conditions of their contract (of employment and/or the policies and procedures of their host institution) and are considered as students under SETU Regulations, Policies and Procedures to include this Policy²'.

2.3 A 'staff member' under this Policy is defined as 'any person who is an employee of South East Technological University'. For the purposes of this Policy, a person in an Emeritus role is included in this category.

2.4 A 'service' under this Policy is defined as 'any service provided by South East Technological University. A service, in the context of this Policy, can be provided by an individual or by a unit/department/function (or equivalent)'.

2.5 A 'complaint' under this Policy (in the context of a student complaint regarding University services) is defined as 'a complaint by a student about the official conduct of business of the University. While an individual may be named in such a complaint (for example, the delivery of lectures), the complaint is a non-personal complaint'.

3. Scope

3.1 This Policy applies to all SETU students.

3.2 The Student Complaints procedures in this Policy deal with the following indicative list of University activities:

- Issues with the University's application, admissions and registration procedures;
- Issues associated with the student's learning activities;
- Issues with academic or support services of the University;

² A student from another institution who is only visiting the University (for example, as part of a visiting sports team or while attending an open day on the campus) is considered as a visitor to South East Technological University and not as a visiting student.

- Issues with facilities provided by the University.

The types of complaints which may be made under this Policy are complaints regarding the delivery of University services and activities related to those services, and are **not** (as noted in section 1.3 above) personal complaints. In this regard, any person who is involved in a complaint under this Policy should **not** interpret the complaint regarding the delivery of University services and activities related to those services as a personal complaint.

As noted under section 1.4 above, the Policy does **not** address student complaints against any staff member that may have possible disciplinary implications.

3.3 It should be noted that some of the issues identified above (and other issues that may come within the remit of the Policy) may be subject to resource and other constraints and may not be capable of resolution. However, students retain the right to complain about these issues and the University will endeavour to progress and resolve these issues as far as is practically possible.

3.4 The Policy may not be used to address complaints that should be specifically dealt with under any other regulation/policy/procedure/structure. Therefore, this Policy does not cover:

Regulation/Policy/Procedure/Structure	Avenue for complaints
Examination/academic appeals	See relevant SETU examination rules (section 8.3.20) and SETU academic appeals processes (section 8.14). References to sections here are to the Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes .
General student disciplinary matters	See the Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure for non-academic disciplinary matters and the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and Disciplinary Procedure for academic disciplinary matters.
Bullying and Harassment issues	See the Dignity and Respect Policy for Students .
Sexual Harassment issues	See the Sexual Misconduct: Student Policy and Procedure .

University Regulations, Policies and Procedures	Where specific provisions or procedures exist within particular University Regulations, Policies or Procedures, these should be utilised instead.
Complaints relating to Clubs & Societies	Contact the Complaints Resolution Officer .
Complaints relating to the Students Union	Contact the Students Union President .
Complaints relating to the Medical Centre	Contact the Complaints Resolution Officer .
Complaints relating to events before the student became an SETU student	Contact the Complaints Resolution Officer .
Complaints relating to the operation of Freedom of Information and/or Data Protection legislation	Contact the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Officer .

4. General principles

4.1 In implementing this Policy and the associated procedures, SETU management is committed to ensuring that:

- Complaints from students are handled in all instances, in so far as is possible, in a co-operative rather than an adversarial way. Towards this end, every effort should be made in each instance to arrive at a solution by consensus where this is possible.
- Complaints are at all times handled in a transparent, fair, timely, sensitive and confidential manner, with due recognition of the personal implications for anyone involved.
- Students will not be disadvantaged because they make a complaint. Student concerns in this regard may be referred to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning. In view of the importance of the examination and assessment process, it is recognised that fairness must be seen to be evident. This Policy does not interfere with the student's normal rights to appeal the result of an examination or any form of assessment (which do not fall under this Policy).
- Complaints and any responses should be confined to addressing the facts relating to the complaint. Personal comments are not appropriate.

- Any service which is the subject of a complaint under this Policy has a right to know what is being alleged and who is invoking the complaint procedure. A copy of the complaint form (where one is completed) will be provided to the relevant service that is the subject of a complaint under this Policy.

4.2 Complaints can provide an important source of feedback on the performance of the University's services. As such, the University will monitor the registration of complaints and the progress towards resolution (see also Section 7 below). The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching & Learning will report on an annual basis (and more often if required) to the Executive Management Team and Governing Body to ensure complaint trends are monitored and that relevant quality issues are identified and addressed. Information that would identify any individuals involved will not be included in this report.

5. Stages in the Complaints Process

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 There are two stages in the Complaints Process, the first is the informal process (section 5.2) and the second is the formal process (section 5.3).

5.1.2 The student making the complaint and the service/representative of the service that is responsible for the subject of their complaint are entitled to be accompanied at all stages of the complaints process by an appropriate person of their choosing in a support capacity.

5.1.3 A complaint must normally be made within one calendar month of the alleged occurrence of the issue or problem which is the subject of the complaint. Complaints that are not lodged within this timeframe may not be entertained.

5.1.4 All parties to a complaint are encouraged to, where possible, try to reach a timely resolution to the complaint.

5.1.5 SETU will seek to address complaints in a timely manner, providing reasonable deadlines at each stage of the process. Where possible, SETU will attempt to arrive at a decision regarding a complaint (within the context of this Policy) within one calendar month. However, delays may occur where the complaint is complex or relevant individuals are not available to attend meetings or where the Student Complaints procedure has been suspended for good reason. All relevant parties will be provided with updates where there is a delay. Complaints that are received outside of the normal academic calendar may require a longer response time in order for all key personnel to input into the process.

5.2 Stage 1: Informal Process

5.2.1 This first stage will generally be an oral process and a formal, written record will not be made. This stage will require the involvement of a Head of Department (or equivalent) or SETU Manager³.

5.2.2 The University appreciates that there may be occasions where Stage 1 is inappropriate and/or that a more formal approach is necessary. In such circumstances, the student may proceed directly to Stage 2.

5.3 Stage 2: Formal Process

5.3.1 To make a formal complaint, using the formal process, the student should complete a [Student Complaint Form](#).

5.3.2 The completed Student Complaint Form should (depending on the nature of the complaint) be sent by the student to the student's Head of Faculty or to the appropriate Head of Function⁴ as necessary. The complaint should be specific and comprehensively documented.

5.3.3 A formal complaint may be withdrawn at any stage by the student. This must be in writing to the Head of Faculty/Function to whom the original formal complaint was made, and the matter will then be considered closed.

6. Complaints Procedure

This section outlines the procedures to be followed depending on whether the Stage 1 (Informal) or Stage 2 (Formal) Process is being followed.

6.1 Stage 1: Informal Process

6.1.1 The student will request a meeting with their Head of Department (or equivalent) or the appropriate SETU manager to discuss the matter informally. This meeting should

³ The relevant SETU Manager will depend on the service that is responsible for the subject of the student's complaint. If a student is unsure who the relevant SETU Manager is, they may wish to check this with their Head of Department, Programme Leader or the Student's Union for guidance.

⁴ The appropriate Head of Function will depend on the service that is responsible for the subject of the student's complaint. If a student is unsure who the relevant Head of Function is, they may wish to check this with their Head of Department, Programme Leader or the Student's Union for guidance.

be constructive, with a view to resolving the matter. The student may elect to have a support accompany them at the meeting.

The Head of Department/SETU Manager is entitled to be accompanied by a colleague as a support at any meetings pertaining to the complaint that take place with any parties relevant to the complaint.

6.1.2 Where appropriate, the Head of Department/the SETU manager will seek to meet with the service or a representative of the service to discuss the matter as soon as is practicable. This meeting should be constructive, with a view to resolving the matter.

6.1.3 Reference should be made to the course documentation or to any relevant SETU regulation, policy or procedure, if necessary, as part of this process.

6.1.4 Having considered the complaint, the Head of Department/ SETU Manager must arrive at a decision and will advise the parties to the complaint (the student and the service/representative) of their decision. This may include that the complaint (or aspects of the complaint) has no substance or how the complaint will be resolved.

6.1.5 Where any of the parties to the complaint dispute the decision of the Head of Department/ SETU Manager, the complaint may be progressed through the formal process outlined in 6.2 below.

6.2 Stage 2: Formal Process

6.2.1 If the matter cannot be resolved through the Informal Process above, or if the student does not wish to avail of the process in 6.1 above because they believe that a Formal Process is necessary, the student may complete a [Student Complaint Form](#) and submit it to the Head of Faculty/Function (or their nominee⁵).

6.2.2 The Head of Faculty/Function should acknowledge the receipt of the form to the student. The Head of Faculty/Function should then initiate a meeting with the student as soon as is practicable to discuss the complaint. The student may elect to have a support accompany them at the meeting. The Head of Faculty/Function is entitled to be accompanied by a colleague as a support at any meetings pertaining to the complaint that take place with any parties relevant to the complaint.

6.2.3 The following procedures will apply:

- Reference should be made to the course documentation or to any relevant SETU regulation, policy or procedure, if necessary, as part of this process.
- The Head of Faculty/Function will advise the service of the complaint and will arrange a meeting with the service (or a representative of the service)

⁵ The Head of Faculty/Function may appoint a nominee to carry out the Stage 2: Formal Process. The nominee will not have previously had any involvement in the process regarding the complaint in question and will be at an appropriate management level.

to discuss the complaint as soon as is practicable. If the service fails to engage with the process, the Head of Faculty/Function will continue with the remaining procedures and issue their decision when completed (see section 6.2.4 below).

- Both the student and the service/representative may elect to have a support (e.g. a Union representative; a Student Union Officer; a colleague; a friend) accompany them at such meetings.
- The Head of Faculty/Function should retain appropriate written records of such meetings.
- The Head of Faculty/Function can arrange meetings with others who may have information pertinent to the complaint (who may also be accompanied by a support). An appropriate written record will be retained of any such meetings.

6.2.4 Having considered the complaint, the Head of Faculty/Function will issue a written decision to the student and the service detailing the issue or problem and any solutions or actions that they are going to implement or that have already been implemented. This may include that the complaint (or aspects of the complaint) has no substance or how the complaint will be resolved.

6.2.5 A copy of the written decision will be sent to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching & Learning for recording purposes.

6.3 Appeals Process

6.3.1 Following the issuing of a written decision to the student and the service under 6.2.4 above, either party will have a right to appeal the decision in writing.

6.3.2 Any such appeal must be made to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching & Learning within 5 working days of the issuing of the written decision.

6.3.3 An appeal may only be made on the following grounds:

- (a) The procedure to address the complaint was not followed accurately or fairly, or;
- (b) Relevant information was not considered by the decision maker in arriving at their decision.

6.3.4 If an Appeal on the above grounds is requested by the student or the service within the permitted time, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching & Learning will convene an Appeal Panel to consider the matter.

6.3.5 The Appeal Panel will consist of at least three members at an appropriate management level and, where possible, a student representative, none of whom can have been involved with the complaint previously.

6.3.6 The Appeal Panel will be entitled to determine the Appeal in private or may, where necessary, seek further materials and/or meeting with the student and/or service/representative, and any other relevant party.

6.3.7 The Appeal Panel may, following its review of the Appeal:

- (a) Accept the Appeal and overturn the original decision (in whole or in part);
- (b) Reject the Appeal and uphold the original decision (in whole or in part);
- (c) In exceptional circumstances, on foot of additional relevant information provided during the course of the Appeal (i) refer such materials to the original decision maker at 6.2 above for their consideration and comment and/or (ii) consider a different outcome on foot of such additional information.

6.3.8 The Appeal Panel shall issue its written decision to the student and the service.

6.3.9 The Appeal Panel shall be and is the final arbiter within SETU in respect of any matters pertaining to decisions regarding student complaints made under this Policy.

6.3.10 A copy of the written decision of the Appeal Panel will be sent to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching & Learning for recording purposes.

6.3.11 If a student is not satisfied with how their complaint has been dealt with by SETU, they have the right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman (www.ombudsman.ie).

6.3.12 If the service/representative is dissatisfied with the outcome at any stage of the process, they may avail of the University's procedures for the resolution of grievances/disputes.

7. Reporting and records

7.1 Each Head of Faculty/Function will prepare annually (and more often if required) an anonymised summary of complaints handled during the academic year under this Policy. A complaint will only be reported on in the anonymised summary of complaints if it has been received in writing (i.e. it is a formal complaint under section 6.2 above).

7.2 The anonymised summary report will include the following information:

- Name of Faculty/Function
- Number of complaints received
- Nature of complaints by category

- Status of Complaints (by category: numbers resolved and not resolved)
- General Comments/Recommendations

7.3 The anonymised summary reports will be forwarded to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching & Learning who will collate the information (along with similar information related to any appeals) and present it to the Executive Management Team and Governing Body.

7.4 Records of meetings and of relevant reports, documentation or correspondence related to complaints will be retained by the Head of Faculty/ Function/ Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching & Learning as appropriate for a period of five years or until such time as the complaints process has concluded, whichever is longer, in accordance with SETU policy and in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection legislation as amended from time to time. The parties involved will have access to records of meetings at which they were present.

7.5 Relevant information relating to a complaint will be made available to others only insofar as noted in these procedures for further processing of the complaint, or where matters need to be referred to others outside of the Policy for resolution.

8. Review of Policy

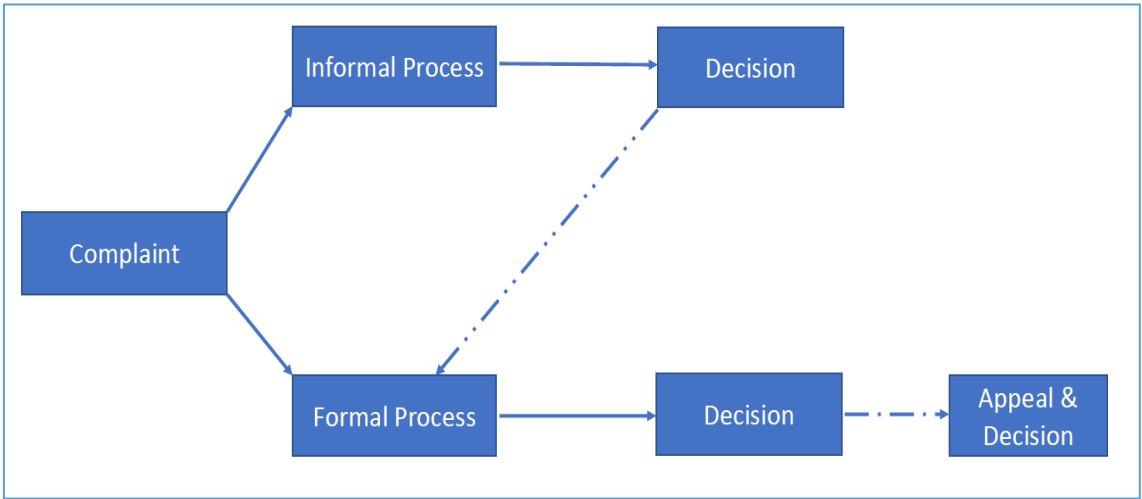
8.1 This policy will be reviewed in advance of the review date, and/or as soon as possible following new or updated legislation, national or sectoral policy.

9. Policy author

9.1 The author of this policy is the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning. Any feedback or issues arising on implementation of this policy should be communicated to the policy author. The policy author is responsible to ensure that the Policy Owner is aware of these comments when reviewing the policy.

Appendix 1:

High level workflow diagram of Complaints Procedure under the Student Complaints Policy



Key:



Typical paths through Complaints Procedure



Additional paths through Complaints Procedure which may arise due to movement from one process to another or appeal