



## Applicant complaints and feedback procedures

### General principles

1. At the University of Bristol we are committed to the provision of high quality, fair and transparent admissions procedures for all our applicants. We recognise, however, that there may be occasions when applicants will wish to ask why their application has been rejected, or believe that they have cause for complaint. Applicants have no right of appeal against a decision not to offer them a place at the University. Because of the level of competition for places, there will inevitably be occasions when an applicant disagrees with the decision.
2. In this context, **feedback** is defined as the communication from the University to an applicant, on request from the applicant, who has been unsuccessful in gaining an offer of a place. A **complaint** is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction either about the way in which an application has been handled or the outcome of the selection or fees classification process. In either case, it may concern actions or inaction by the University or its staff. An **appeal** is defined as a request for a formal review of the outcome of an admissions decision.

### Feedback

1. In the case of full-time undergraduate applications, we aim to send an email to unsuccessful applicants in order to explain the outcome in general terms by providing contextual data about competition levels, and the admissions procedures followed. The email will be sent at the time the decision is sent to UCAS.
2. The University has made great efforts to provide clear minimum entry requirements for all its courses. These can be found in the prospectus (paper and online course finder), school websites, and on UCAS Search. The University also provides clear information on assessment criteria in Admissions Statements. The University expects applicants to have read the available information on entry requirements and assessment criteria before requesting further feedback, as in many cases this will explain why their application has been unsuccessful.
3. Requests for further, individual feedback should be sent either to the Admissions Office (for full-time undergraduate applications) or the relevant Faculty Office (for postgraduate and direct-entry applications). Please visit our contacts page ([www.bristol.ac.uk/study/contacts.html](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/contacts.html)). Requests should be made as soon as possible after the decision, and, in the case of undergraduate applications, always before 30 June. Requests for feedback after that point will not be considered. Requests for further feedback will be acknowledged, and then addressed as soon as workload allows. This may not be addressed until after the peak admissions processing time has passed (in April, for full-time undergraduate applications). For postgraduate and direct-entry applications, the Faculty Office may have to consult with academic staff in order to respond to the request for feedback, and a response will be provided when workload allows. The University will only correspond about a decision with the applicant.

4. In most cases, lack of success is due to the level of competition for places rather than any specific weakness in an application, and consequently, we will not be able to advise applicants on how to strengthen any subsequent application. The exceptions are if an applicant did not have, for example, a crucial element such as work experience for the professional courses, or if they did not meet the minimum entry requirements.
5. In all cases, it will be made clear to the applicant that, even if another application will be considered, there is no guarantee that an offer will ensue, as all applications are considered afresh, in competition with that cohort. Previous applications are not kept for reference. Equally, and for the same reasons, there will be no discrimination against any applicant who requests feedback.
6. Requests for feedback on a particular applicant from a third party will receive a response indicating general levels of competition and admissions criteria for the course applied for, but information about the individual will not be divulged. General requests from schools, for information on admissions processes, will be answered by the UK Student Recruitment Office or International Office.
7. It will be made clear that further correspondence will not be entered into, and that the decision will not be reviewed. If the applicant feels the admissions process has not been followed correctly, they must use the complaints procedure.

## **Complaints**

### General principles

1. Applicants have no right of appeal against a decision not to offer them a place at the University. Because of the level of competition for places, there will inevitably be occasions when an applicant disagrees with a selection decision. Providing that the decision can be shown to have been reached fairly and in accordance with the published selection criteria, the original decision will not be overturned. However, should an applicant believe that University admissions principles and procedures have been inconsistently or incorrectly applied, these complaints procedures provide a mechanism for objective review for both undergraduate, postgraduate and direct-entry applicants.
2. Complaints may be made by individual applicants or by groups of applicants; they may not be made by a representative, a parent, a school or any other third party.
3. This Procedure sets out how applicants may seek to have complaints addressed. It should be recognised that the vast majority of applicant complaints can be handled fairly, amicably, and to the satisfaction of all concerned without recourse to the formal complaints procedure.
4. In the first instance, applicants with a complaint should raise it informally with the relevant member of staff in the Admissions Office or (for postgraduate or direct-entry applications) with the relevant faculty office. Please visit our contacts page. (See also point 2 of The Process.)
5. If this course of action proves unsatisfactory, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.
6. The University will seek to ensure that all complaints are treated seriously and constructively. It will also seek to ensure that complaints are dealt with promptly, with

fairness and consistency and with due regard to the University's Equal Opportunities Policy. If a complaint is upheld, the University will take such action or provide such remedy as may be appropriate and will do so promptly. If a complaint is not upheld, the reasons for the decision will be communicated to the applicant.

7. There will be no discrimination against any applicant who makes a complaint.
8. Applicants lodging a complaint and those against whom complaints are made may expect complaints to be dealt with confidentially and with respect for their privacy. However, it may be necessary to disclose information to others in order to deal with the complaint and in these circumstances the parties concerned will be informed of such disclosure.
9. Anonymous complaints will not be dealt with under this procedure. Staff who receive anonymous complaints will be expected to use their discretion and judgement as to how to handle such complaints.
10. The Complaints Procedure provides for both informal and formal stages in the handling of a complaint. At each stage of the process, the person to whom the complaint has been referred shall, if it is upheld, wholly or in part, apply such remedies as are within her/his powers. If s/he considers that the remedy is outside her/his powers, s/he shall refer the matter to the appropriate authority. If s/he feels unable to fulfil the requirements of the Complaints Procedure objectively because of prior involvement in the case, s/he will refer the matter to a more senior colleague. Complaints will not be rejected solely on the grounds of minor procedural deficiencies on the part of the complainant. Any correspondence with the complainant will make it clear which stage of the Complaints Procedure is being applied.
11. The Head of Admissions will monitor, on an annual basis, formal complaints which have been referred, and will be responsible for implementing, or recommending to the appropriate authority, changes to systems or procedures suggested by the nature and pattern of the complaints received. Such records will contain: name (anonymised), age, gender and ethnicity (if known) of complainant, programme of study applied for, summary of complaint and summary of outcome. The outcome of such monitoring may also inform other processes or activities such as arrangements for interview or standard correspondence with applicants. The Student Recruitment Committee shall receive annually a report on the outcome of the monitoring processes and shall consider in the light of the report whether changes to the University's systems and to the Complaints Procedure itself would be appropriate.
12. The Complaints Procedure may be invoked by any individual who has submitted a formal application for full-time or part-time undergraduate study or full-time or part-time postgraduate study at the University of Bristol.
13. Advice about the Complaints Procedure may be obtained from the Deputy Head of Admissions (undergraduate or postgraduate).
14. The Complaints Procedure was approved by the Student Recruitment Committee in July 2016 and forms part of the University's overall quality assurance framework. It is informed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's Code of Practice for the Assurance of Quality in Recruitment and Admissions, and in particular by section B2.

## **The process**

### **Stage one: informal complaint**

1. Most complaints can be resolved satisfactorily on an informal basis.
2. The applicant should normally first raise her/his complaint either orally or in writing with the relevant member of staff in the Undergraduate Admissions Office (for full-time undergraduate applications), or the relevant Faculty Office (for postgraduate or direct-entry applications), or the Deputy Head of Admissions (undergraduate or postgraduate), outlining the nature and details of her/his complaint. Please visit our contacts page ([www.bristol.ac.uk/study/contacts.html](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/contacts.html)).
3. The complaint must be made within 14 days of the actions (or lack of actions) that prompted the complaint, and complaints made outside this timeframe will not be considered. The appropriate staff member shall respond to the complaint normally within ten working days of a complaint being made and shall retain a record of the correspondence and any action taken. If it proves impossible to respond fully within ten working days, the complainant shall be informed of the timescale for the receipt of a full response.
4. If the complaint is about non-selection, the relevant staff member must satisfy her/himself that the application was considered fairly and that the decision did comply with the relevant selection policy. Provided that she/he is satisfied that this is the case, a response explaining the context of the decision (eg demand for places) and the selection policy that has been applied is acceptable at this stage. The response should also draw the applicant's attention to the Complaints Procedure, in case she/he wishes to pursue the matter further. Similarly, if the Deputy Head of Admissions (undergraduate or postgraduate) is satisfied that the Education (Fees and Awards) (England) Regulations 2007 have been correctly applied, a response explaining these regulations is acceptable at this stage. For all other complaints, if a complaint is rejected, the relevant staff member must state the precise reasons.
5. If an informal complaint is of a general rather than specific nature, it may be more appropriately addressed in writing to the Deputy Head of Admissions (undergraduate or postgraduate).

### **Stage two: formal complaint**

1. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the response s/he receives from the relevant staff member, s/he should submit, within ten working days of receiving the response, a written complaint to the Head of Admissions. Any complaints received outside this timeframe will not be considered.
2. The written complaint should set out briefly: the nature of the complaint; the informal steps already taken (if any); details of the response received; and a statement as to why the applicant remains dissatisfied and, without prejudice to any formal remedy which might be determined, the remedy which s/he is seeking. The Head of Admissions shall acknowledge in writing receipt of a complaint within five working days. The Head of Admissions will investigate the complaint and submit an interim written response to the complainant, normally within 15 working days of the receipt of the complaint. If it should prove impossible to respond fully within 15 working days, the applicant shall be informed in writing of the timescale for the receipt of a full response. This assumes that the Head of Admissions has had no previous involvement in the selection decision. In the event that

this is not the case, the Head of Admissions will refer the formal complaint to a senior manager for an objective decision.

3. In the event of any concern that the applicant has been unfairly treated, the Head of Admissions will take the matter up with the relevant Admissions team or Head of School.
4. The Head of Admissions' decision following completion of this process will be considered as final.

#### **Further information**

Further information about or clarification of these procedures is available either from the Deputy Head of Admissions (undergraduate/postgraduate), tel +44 (0)117 394 1649

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