

Applicant appeals, complaints and feedback policy

1. General principles

1.1 The University of Bristol is committed to the provision of high-quality, fair and transparent admissions procedures for all applicants. We recognise, however, that there may be occasions when applicants wish to ask why their application has been unsuccessful, or believe that they have cause for complaint. Admissions principles and procedures for [undergraduate](#), postgraduate taught and postgraduate research applicants are available online.

1.2 Applicants who experience a problem with the admissions process should raise the matter informally in the first instance with the admissions staff who have been dealing with their application. If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved, applicants may invoke the formal process outlined in this document.

1.3 All feedback requests, appeals and complaints made to the University are handled confidentially in accordance with the [University's Fair Processing Notice](#), the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 and the Data Protection Act 2018.

1.4 The University will not consider feedback requests, complaints and appeals submitted by third parties without the consent of the applicant.

1.5 Applicant appeals, complaints and feedback requests may be shared with relevant University staff for the purpose of these procedures.

1.6 Applicants requesting feedback, or submitting an appeal or complaint, will not be discriminated against at any stage of the admissions process. Each case will be dealt fairly, consistently and with due regard to the University's [Equality and Diversity policy](#).

1.7 This policy was approved by the Student Recruitment Committee in July 2020 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.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy covers complaints, appeals and feedback requests relating to the admissions process to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the University of Bristol. Once a student has enrolled at the University, this policy is no longer applicable. Current students wishing to lodge a complaint should refer to the [Student Complaints Procedure](#). Decisions relating to funding and scholarships are not covered under this policy.

3. Definitions

3.1 Applicant 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.

3.2 An appeal is defined as a request for a formal review of the outcome of an admissions decision, either at offer stage or at confirmation of results.

3.3 An applicant complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about:

- the way in which an application has been handled;
- the outcome of the selection process; or
- the fees classification process.

In any of these cases, the complaint may concern actions or inaction by the University or its staff.

4. Applicant feedback

4.1 The University provides clear minimum entry requirements for all its courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. These can be found in the relevant University prospectuses (in print and online), and on UCAS Search. The University also provides clear information on assessment criteria in its [undergraduate](#) and postgraduate Admissions Statements. Applicants are advised to read the information on entry requirements and assessment criteria before requesting further feedback, as in many cases this will explain why their application has been unsuccessful.

4.2 Candidates whose application to a full-time undergraduate course is unsuccessful will receive an email from the University outcome of the decision in general terms, by providing contextual data about competition levels, and the admissions procedures followed. The University sends this email at the same time as informing UCAS of its decision. An outline of the reasons for our decision communicated to UCAS for applicants to view via UCAS track.

4.3 Applicants may request further, individual, feedback if the reason for their unsuccessful application is still unclear. The process for requesting feedback can be found in section 5.

4.4 In most cases, lack of success in the application process is due to the level of competition for places rather than any specific weakness in an application, and consequently the University cannot advise applicants on how to strengthen any subsequent application. In some cases, unsuccessful applications are the result of a candidate lacking, for example, a crucial element such as work experience (for courses leading to professional qualifications), or failing to meet the minimum entry requirements.

4.5 There is no guarantee that a subsequent application will be successful, as all applications are considered afresh, in competition with the cohort for the year in question. Previous applications are not kept for reference.

4.6 The University responds to requests for feedback on a particular applicant from a third party (where consent has been obtained) by indicating general levels of competition and admissions criteria for the course in question, but does not divulge information about the individual. General queries from schools for information on the admissions process are answered by the UK Student Recruitment Office or International Office.

4.7 Once the University has made a selection decision, it will not enter into further correspondence with the applicant, nor review its decision, unless the applicant feels that the admissions process has not been followed correctly. In such cases, applicants must follow the appeals and complaints procedure as detailed in this policy.

5. Process for requesting feedback on an unsuccessful application

Undergraduate applicants

5.1 Feedback requests should be submitted to the undergraduate admissions team via the applicant dashboard.

5.2 Requests should be made as soon as possible after the selection decision, and, in the case of undergraduate applications, before 30 June. The University is unable to consider requests for feedback after this date. Requests will be acknowledged, and then addressed as soon as workload allows. This may not be until after the peak admissions processing time (April for full-time undergraduate applications).

Postgraduate applicants

5.3 Feedback requests should be submitted in writing to the relevant school or faculty admissions office. Contact information is available online.

5.4 The faculty office may consult with academic staff before responding to feedback requests; a response will be provided when workload allows.

6. Appeals and grounds for appeal

6.1 The University does not accept appeals, nor overturn its original decision, in cases where the decision can be shown to have been reached fairly and in accordance with published selection criteria.

6.2 Applicants may appeal the outcome of an admissions decision on the following grounds only:

- procedural error where the process leading to the admissions decision was not conducted in accordance with the University's [Admissions Principles and Procedures](#) or Admissions Statements;
- bias or prejudice.

6.3 There are no grounds for appeal where an application to a postgraduate research programme is unsuccessful due to the lack of a suitable supervisor or appropriate academic facilities.

7. Appeals process

7.1 Applicants who believe there are genuine grounds for appeal (section 6.2) may request an appeal by email, or in writing, to the relevant admissions team. The applicant should clearly state the reasons for requesting an appeal.

7.2 Appeal requests must be submitted within 14 days of date of initial admissions decision. The University will endeavour to send an initial acknowledgement of the appeal within five days of receipt.

7.3 Admissions staff will investigate the case to determine whether further action is required. If necessary the case will be referred to a higher level. The University will endeavour to make a decision on the case within 28 working days. At certain times of year and for particularly complex cases this may take longer.

- For undergraduate programmes, cases are considered by admissions Selection Assistants in the first instance, and referred to admissions Selectors, admissions Managers and the Head of Admissions (UG) if necessary.
- For postgraduate programmes, cases are considered by school or faculty admissions teams in the first instance, and referred to school or faculty admissions managers if necessary.

7.5 Appeals are either dismissed or found to be justified.

7.6 The admissions team determines the response to those appeals found to be justified.

8. Complaints

8.1 Most complaints are resolved satisfactorily on an informal basis (section 9.1). Complaints that cannot be resolved informally may be escalated through the formal complaints procedure (section 9.2).

8.2 Complaints should be raised as soon as issues arise to enable prompt investigation and swift resolution. Applicants may raise a complaint within 90 days of becoming aware of the issue, unless there is good reason for the delay.

8.3 The University endeavours to acknowledge complaints within five days from receipt, and to respond fully within 14 days (for each stage, informal and formal, as necessary). If the University is unable to respond fully within this period, it will inform the complainant of an alternative timescale.

8.4 An annual review of formal complaints is undertaken by the Director of Admissions, to ensure that necessary corrective actions, recommendations and process changes are in place.

8.5 The University does not process anonymous complaints under this procedure. Staff respond to such complaints at their discretion.

9. Complaints process

9.1 Informal complaints process (stage 1)

i) In the first instance, applicants should raise complaints with the relevant member of admissions staff. Undergraduate applicants should contact the admissions team referenced in their email correspondence, or the undergraduate admissions compliance team. Postgraduates/direct-entry applicants should contact the relevant school/faculty office via our contacts page, or the postgraduate admissions compliance team.

ii) Informal complaints can be made face-to-face, by phone, in writing or by email.

iii) Admissions staff will gather the information required for assessing the complaint.

iv) If the complaint is not satisfactorily resolved, applicants may follow the formal complaints procedure.

9.2 Formal complaints process (stage 2)

i) If complaints have not been satisfactorily resolved via the informal process (stage 1), applicants may submit a formal complaint. ii) Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the relevant admissions compliance team within 14 days of receipt of the response to the original informal complaint (see stage 1).

9.3 The Director of Admissions will review formal complaints and the resulting decision will be considered as final.