

Applicant Complaints and Appeals policy

1 General Principles

- 1.1 The University of Bristol is committed to the provision of a robust selection process that is fair, transparent, and consistent. Application decisions are made by a professional admissions team to safeguard applicants' interests and provide a high-quality service to all applicants. Information on our admissions policies, procedures and selection process are available on our website.
- 1.2 We recognise, however, that there may be occasions when applicants believe that they have cause for complaint or appeal. This policy document outlines the procedures that should be followed in such cases.
- 1.3 Applicants who believe they have [grounds for appeal or complaint](#) are encouraged to raise the matter via the [informal process](#) in the first instance. If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved, applicants may invoke the [formal process](#) as outlined in this document.
- 1.4 Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the informal route for complaints or appeals before proceeding to the formal process. If a formal case is submitted without having utilised the informal procedure, the university may, at its discretion, direct the case to the informal route for resolution first. This approach aims to address issues more swiftly and preserve the option for formal review if needed. Applicants will be made aware where this discretion is applied.
- 1.5 All complaints and appeals 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. Applicant complaints and appeals may be shared with relevant University staff for the purpose of these procedures.
- 1.6 The University will not consider complaints or appeals submitted by third parties unless the applicant has given express consent to the University to correspond with a nominated contact (family member, agent, representative).
- 1.7 The University does not process anonymous complaints or appeals under these procedures.
- 1.8 Applicants submitting a complaint or appeal will not be discriminated against at any stage of the admissions process; nor will they be discriminated against in any future applications. Each case will be dealt with fairly and with due regard to the [University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy](#).

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy covers complaints and appeals that raise concerns about a procedural error or irregularity in the admissions process at the University of Bristol. It may concern actions or inaction by the University or its staff, that are not in accordance with published policies and procedures.
- 2.2 Applicants wishing to appeal their fee status should refer to the [fee status information page](#) for specific guidance to ensure their case is handled appropriately.
- 2.3 Students already enrolled on a programme of study with the University of Bristol are not covered by this policy and should instead refer to the [Student Complaints Procedure](#) or the [Academic Appeal Procedure](#).

3 Definitions

- 3.1 A **complaint** is defined as an expression of specific concern about action or lack of action by or on behalf of the University, or about the standard of service provided in the implementation of admissions policies or procedures.
- 3.2 An **appeal** is defined as a request for a formal review of the outcome of an admissions decision based on grounds of a procedural error being made. Appeals will normally be allowed only where there is evidence of a material irregularity in the decision-making process.

4 Grounds for complaint or appeal

- 4.1 There are no specific grounds for **complaint**, but the matter will typically relate to issues or concerns arising from the policies, procedures or communications that were used within the Admissions process. The complaint may relate to actions, or the lack of actions, by the University or its staff.
- 4.2 Applicants may **appeal** the outcome of an admissions decision, and request that it is reviewed, where there is evidence of prejudice or bias in the decision-making process, or a procedural irregularity where the process leading to the admissions decision was not conducted in accordance with the relevant admissions policy.

For ease of reference, links to admissions policy documents are provided here:

- [Undergraduate applicant policies, procedures and regulations](#)
- [Postgraduate applicant policies, procedures and regulations](#)

- 4.3 Applicants may not submit a complaint or appeal which seeks to dispute the academic or professional judgement of admissions staff regarding an individual's suitability for entry.
- 4.4 The University will take no further action in cases where it can be shown that decisions and/or actions have been carried out fairly and appropriately in accordance with published selection criteria, policies, and procedures.

5 Complaints & Appeals Procedure

The Applicant Complaints and Appeals policy is intended to provide a streamlined process with a focus on early resolution, and is made up of three stages:

- 5.1 [Informal Stage](#) - Most complaints and appeals are resolved swiftly and satisfactorily on an informal basis. Applicants should submit their case informally in the first instance.
- 5.2 [Formal Stage](#) – Applicants may wish to submit their case for formal review if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal stage, or if they believe informal resolution is not appropriate due to the complexity or seriousness of the case.
- 5.3 [Review Stage](#) - Applicants can request that their case is considered by the Assistant Director of Admissions for a review of the process to ensure that appropriate procedures were followed and that the decision-making was reasonable.

6 Informal Stage

- 6.1 Applicants should submit their case informally in the first instance, so that it can be reviewed by the Admissions team for swift action. Cases must be submitted using the [online appeals form](#) to ensure it is directed to the appropriate team for review.
- 6.2 Applicants wishing to appeal their fee status should refer to the [fee status information page](#) for specific guidance to ensure their case is handled appropriately.
- 6.3 Cases should be raised within 28 days of the issue or concern arising. Where exceptional circumstances lead to a delay in submission, these circumstances must be outlined within the case submission, for consideration by the Admissions team.
- 6.4 Applicants must clearly outline the nature of their case and provide details about the issue, procedural error or malpractice that is believed to have occurred.
- 6.5 Admissions staff will review the information and any supporting evidence provided by the applicant to determine what further action may be required.
- 6.6 The University endeavours to acknowledge informal complaints and appeals within five working days of receipt, and to respond fully within 15 working days via email. If the University is unable to respond fully within this time, it will inform the complainant of an alternative timescale.
- 6.7 If the case is not satisfactorily resolved, applicants may follow the formal stage of this complaints and appeals procedure.

7 Formal Stage

- 7.1 If an applicant feels that their case has not been satisfactorily resolved via the informal process, they have the right to submit a case for formal review.
- 7.2 Applicants must write to the University via submission of our [Formal Applicant Complaints and Appeals form](#), for investigation by Heads of Service (relevant to level of study applied for).

- 7.3 If a case is submitted without having first utilised the informal route, the University may, at its discretion, redirect the case to the informal stage. This decision is made to ensure that the case can be addressed swiftly by the admissions team and to preserve the option for formal review should the informal process not satisfactorily resolve the issue. Where an applicant wishes to waive this option and would prefer their complaint/appeal to be reviewed formally in first instance, they will be required to state this as well as the reason(s) why they have chosen not to utilise the informal route.
- 7.4 Cases should be raised within 28 days of the issue or concern arising or, if applicable, within 28 days of the case being closed via the informal process. Where exceptional circumstances lead to a delay in submission, these circumstances must be outlined within the case for consideration.
- 7.5 Applicants must outline the nature of their case and provide clear details as to where they believe the issue, procedural error or malpractice occurred within the [Formal Applicant Complaints and Appeals form](#). Applicants must also include any information, correspondence, or documentation that supports their case to admissions-appeals@bristol.ac.uk.
- 7.6 The University endeavours to acknowledge formal complaints and appeals within five days of receipt. This communication will be sent by email.
- 7.7 The relevant Head of Service will investigate the case to determine whether further action is required. If necessary, the case will be referred to a higher authority, such as the Assistant Director of Admissions and Applicant Experience, the Director of Student Recruitment, Admissions and Success or the University Secretary's Office.
- 7.8 The University will endeavour to make a decision on cases submitted for formal review within 28 days of receipt. At certain times of year, and for particularly complex cases, this may take longer. Where this is the case, an updated timeline will be made known to the applicant, along with reasons for the delay.
- 7.9 Applicants will be made aware of the outcome of their case via email. The resulting decision will be considered final.

8 Review Stage

- 8.1 Applicants who believe that their case has not been handled fairly in accordance with the formal procedure may request a review by the Assistant Director of Admissions and Applicant Experience within 10 working days of the formal stage outcome. Requests must be sent to the senior colleague who provided the Formal Stage response.
- 8.2 Applicants may submit a case for review where there is evidence of a procedural irregularity during the formal stage, or where there is doubt that the outcome was reached fairly.
- 8.3 The Assistant Director of Admissions and Applicant Experience (or nominee) will review and investigate all details relating to the case and provide a written response to the applicant, normally within 28 days of receipt of the review request.

- 8.4 The decision reached by the Assistant Director of Admissions and Applicant Experience (or nominee) is final. Once this decision has been communicated to the applicant, no further consideration of the case will be heard.
- 8.5 Applicants who remain dissatisfied are not yet supported by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator but do have the right to pursue recourse and seek further advice through other independent bodies, such as [Citizens Advice](#) (England, Wales and Scotland).

9 Monitoring and Evaluation

- 9.1 An annual evaluation of appeals and complaints received is undertaken by the relevant admissions teams, to ensure that necessary corrective actions and procedural changes are in place. A record of the cases that are received through this procedure are kept for this purpose.
- 9.2 The University ensures that all staff involved in the admissions process are aware of the procedures set out in this document and will undergo regular training to ensure its continued implementation.
- 9.3 This policy forms part of the University's overall quality assurance framework. It is informed by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education for the assurance of quality in Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access, and in particular by Guiding Principle 1, as well as Competition and Markets Authority advice to higher educators (March 2015).
- 9.4 The Applicant Appeals and Complaints Procedure is reviewed regularly.

10 Further Advice and Guidance

- 10.1 Applicants can request additional advice and guidance on the procedure for making an appeal or complaint, by emailing admissions-appeals@bristol.ac.uk