

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 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.
- 1.5 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).
- 1.6 The University does not process anonymous complaints or appeals under these procedures. Staff respond to such complaints and appeals at their discretion.
- 1.7 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 and Diversity 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 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 process

5.1 Most complaints and appeals are resolved satisfactorily on an informal basis. Applicants are strongly encouraged to first follow the [Informal Stage](#) as outlined in this policy. However, this is not compulsory, and applicants can choose to initiate the [Formal Stage](#) from the outset.

5.2 If an applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal review of their complaint or appeal, they maintain the right to progress to the [Formal Stage](#) of this policy.

6 Informal Stage

- 6.1 In the first instance, we strongly recommend that applicants submit their complaint or appeal informally by emailing the Admissions Team at: admissions-compliance@bristol.ac.uk
- 6.2 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 email for consideration.
- 6.3 Applicants must outline the nature of their complaint or appeal and provide details about the issue, procedural error or malpractice that is believed to have occurred.
- 6.4 Admissions staff will review the information and any supporting evidence provided by the applicant to determine what further action may be required.
- 6.5 The University endeavours to acknowledge informal complaints and appeals within five working days of receipt, and to respond fully within 14 days via email. If the University is unable to respond fully within this time, it will inform the complainant of an alternative timescale.
- 6.6 If the complaint/appeal is not satisfactorily resolved, applicants may follow the formal stage of this complaints and appeals procedure.

7 Formal Stage

- 7.1 If an applicant is dissatisfied or feels that their complaint or appeal 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 [Applicant Complaints and Appeals form](#), which will be automatically submitted to the Admissions Compliance Manager for investigation.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 Applicants must outline the nature of their case and provide clear details as to where they believe the issue, procedural error or malpractice occurred. Applicants must also include any information, correspondence, or documentation that supports their case.
- 7.5 The University endeavours to acknowledge formal complaints and appeals within five days of receipt. This communication will be sent by email.
- 7.6 The Admissions Compliance Manager will investigate the case to determine whether further action is required. If necessary, the case will be referred to a higher authority, such as Head of Admissions, Director of Admissions or the University Secretary's Office.
- 7.7 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.

7.8 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 Director of Admissions within 10 working days of the formal stage outcome. Requests must be sent to admissions-compliance@bristol.ac.uk

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 Director of Admissions (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 Director of Admissions (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 is undertaken by the Director of Admissions, to ensure that any 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 was approved by the Student Recruitment Committee in July 2022 and 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 annually.

10 Further Advice and Guidance

10.1 Applicants can contact the Admissions Compliance Team to request additional advice and guidance on the procedure for making an appeal or complaint, by emailing admissions-compliance@bristol.ac.uk