University of Sheffield | Admissions Service

Appeals and Complaints Procedure for Applicants

1 General principles

1.1 The University is committed to operating a high quality admissions service which is fair, efficient and transparent.

1.2 We aim to handle appeals and complaints in a way that:

- encourages informal resolution;
- is fair and efficient;
- is sensitive to, and understanding of, the concerns of applicants; and
- allows for the greatest degree of confidentiality, involving only those who need to be part of the resolution process.

1.3 Appeals and complaints are handled separately from the application for entry. An appeal or complaint made in good faith and in line with our Student Admissions Policy (www.sheffield.ac.uk/study/policies/admissions) will not prejudice the University's opinion of you or our assessment of current or future applications. It is important to note that most appeals and complaints are resolved amicably and without recourse to the formal stage of the procedure.

1.4 Appeals and complaints may be submitted by an individual applicant but not by a third party (school, parent or other representative), unless the third party has the explicit consent from the applicant to act on their behalf.

1.5 Where multiple appeals and/or complaints are received on the same matter, we reserve the right to combine the submissions into a single appeal or complaint case.

1.6 If your appeal, complaint or Case Review submission is longer than 1000 words, we reserve the right to ask you to supply a 1000-word summary for the purposes of our review.

2 Scope of the procedure

2.1 This procedure concerns admissions decisions only. Admissions decisions are defined as decisions relating to the academic selection of candidates for entry to the University and the terms on which candidates are selected, including the assignation of fee status and tuition fee. Admissions decisions do not involve setting the level of the tuition fee, determining arrangements for paying the tuition fee, awarding funding or allocating University accommodation.

2.2 We are only able to consider appeals or complaints relating to applicants, meaning those who have submitted a formal application to the University. We cannot consider appeals or complaints about responses to general enquiries prior to or outside the application process.

2.3 This procedure is relevant to applicants applying for entry to courses where the admissions regulations and selection procedures are the sole responsibility of the University.

2.4 The Appeals and Complaints Procedure cannot be used where our decision resulted from:

- a failure on your part to fulfil academic or non-academic requirements for admission (for example a satisfactory DBS Enhanced Disclosure or medical clearance); or
- feedback from a third party, such as a provider of a work or training placement which forms an integral part of the course to which you have applied.

2.5 We are not able to consider a second appeal or complaint about a matter that has previously been considered through the Appeals and Complaints Procedure for Applicants.

Appeals

2.6 For the purposes of this procedure, an appeal is defined as a request by an applicant for a formal review of the outcome of an admissions decision.

2.7 You may appeal an admissions decision by the University if you feel that the University did not appropriately consider your application in accordance with the Student Admissions Policy and other published procedures, including the University's policies on freedom of speech and academic freedom (www.sheffield.ac.uk/free-speech), or that it did not take account of all the information provided in the application.

2.8 You may not appeal against an admissions decision based on the academic judgement of University staff about your suitability for entry to a particular course. Academic judgement is defined as a judgement where only the opinion of an academic expert is sufficient to decide on the matter in question. Academic judgement is not involved in determining: the fairness of procedures; whether procedures have been correctly interpreted; what the facts are; the appropriateness of the University's communications; whether an opinion has been expressed outside the area of an academic expert's competence; the way the evidence has been considered; or whether there is evidence of bias or maladministration.

2.9 In order for issues to be dealt with and if necessary rectified in a timely manner, appeals should normally be received by the Admissions Service no more than **30 working days** after the issuance of the admissions decision that is being appealed.

Complaints

2.10 For the purposes of this procedure, a complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about:

- the admissions policies and procedures that have been used to reach an admissions decision; or
- the actions, or the lack of actions, by the University or its staff.

2.11 A complaint will not result in the amendment of an admissions decision (see Appeals).

2.12 In order for issues to be dealt with and if necessary rectified in a timely manner, complaints should normally be received by the Admissions Service no more than **three months** after the issue to which the complaint relates. In exceptional circumstances complaints submitted beyond this time frame may be considered if there is deemed a valid reason to do so.

3 The procedure

3.1 Feedback – Stage 1

If you are unhappy with an Admissions decision, or with the way your application has been handled, in the first instance you should seek feedback from the Admissions Tutor/Selector for the course to which you have applied, or from the Admissions Service. Please see the University's Student Admissions Policy for further information on feedback.

3.2 Formal Appeal/Complaint – Stage 2

3.2.1 If you are not satisfied with the feedback provided by the University, you can appeal an Admissions decision or submit a complaint using our Appeals and Complaints form (available to download from www.sheffield.ac.uk/study/policies/appeals-complaints-applicants), or by stating in writing that you are appealing/complaining under Stage 2 of the University's Appeals and Complaints Procedure for Applicants.

3.2.2 We will acknowledge receipt of your request for an appeal or complaint within 3 working days.

Appeals

3.2.3 If you request a review of an Admissions decision through an appeal, the process will be led by the Head of Undergraduate or Postgraduate Admissions, or their nominee, who will review the available application and decision-making information with relevant colleagues.

3.2.4 We will aim to respond within **15 working days** of receipt of the appeal. If a delay is anticipated in responding within the above timescale, we will inform you in writing of the progress being made towards the consideration of your appeal.

3.2.5 If your appeal is upheld, the University will take such reasonable action as is appropriate and you will be informed of the outcome. If your appeal is not upheld, we will communicate the reasons for the decision to you in writing.

Complaints

3.2.6 If you submit a complaint, the Head of Undergraduate or Postgraduate Admissions, or their nominee, will investigate it, seeking relevant information from the academic school or other parts of the University as appropriate, and from yourself if necessary.

3.2.7 In making a complaint, you should provide the following information:

- the nature of, and reasons for, your complaint, giving as much detail as possible;
- any steps you have already taken to resolve the matter, if appropriate;
- details of any response you have received to date and a statement as to why the response(s) is not satisfactory; and
- an indication of the outcome you are seeking.

3.2.8 We will aim to respond within **15 working days** of receipt of the complaint. If a delay is anticipated in responding within the above timescale, we will inform you in writing of the progress being made towards the consideration of your complaint.

3.2.9 If your complaint is upheld, the University will take such reasonable action as is appropriate and you will be informed of the outcome. If your complaint is not upheld, we will communicate the reasons for the decision to you in writing.

3.3 Applicant Case Review – Stage 3

3.3.1 Following Stage 2, if you are not satisfied with the decision taken in respect of your appeal or complaint, you may wish to request a Case Review of the decision. You may only request a Case Review on one or more of the following grounds:

i. that there was a material procedural irregularity which rendered the process leading to the decision taken in respect of your appeal or complaint unfair;
ii. that material which you could not reasonably have been expected to produce at the time of the decision taken in respect of your appeal or complaint casts substantial doubt upon the appropriateness of that decision; or
iii. that the decision taken in respect of your appeal or complaint was manifestly unreasonable.

3.3.2 The request for a Case Review must be made within **10 working days** of the full written response provided in relation to the Stage 2 appeal or complaint, although the Deputy Director (Admissions and Access) of Communications and External Relations or their nominee may extend this time limit. Case Reviews can be requested by submitting a Case Review Request form (available to download from www.sheffield.ac.uk/study/policies/appeals-complaints-applicants).

3.3.3 Your request will be considered by the Deputy Director (Admissions and Access) of Communications and External Relations, or their nominee, who may decide:

i. to uphold the original appeal or complaint;
ii. that the matter should be referred for consideration in line with another University procedure; or
iii. that there are insufficient grounds for further action, thus concluding the consideration of the matter under this procedure.

3.3.4 You will be notified of the decision in writing within **30 working days** of the receipt of the request. If this is not possible, you will be informed in writing of the progress being made towards the consideration of your request for a Case Review.

4 Unacceptable behaviour

The University may exceptionally suspend or terminate consideration of an appeal or complaint where an appellant or complainant's behaviour is unacceptable or disruptive, for example where aggressive or unreasonable demands are made or where repeated representations are made on matters which have already been considered under these procedures.

5 Monitoring, review and approval of the Appeals and Complaints Procedure

5.1 Without breaching confidentiality, all formal appeals and complaints submitted under the University's Appeals and Complaints Procedure for Applicants are monitored, as is the action taken to rectify any practice deemed inappropriate.

5.2 The University's Appeals and Complaints Procedure for Applicants is reviewed annually.

5.3 The Appeals and Complaints Procedure for Applicants was approved by the University's Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals Steering Group in November 2024.

6 Contact information

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