



UNIVERSITY OF  
**BATH**

## **QAA-UKCGE**

**Looking at Examples of Good Practice  
from the QAA's Special Review of  
Research Degree Programmes**

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2007**

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# Good Practice

*The review team noted the following good practice:*

*- the clarity with which complaints and appeals procedures are communicated.*

The slide presentation describes some key features of our processes and principles

- key aspects are in bold

The handout gives additional information taken from published documentation

Documents referred to may have the status of Regulations and/or a Quality Assurance Code of Practice (CoP).

# University CoP Principles

- “The University of Bath has a long-standing commitment to ***fair and transparent*** regulatory structures and procedures which operate ***effectively*** and in a ***timely fashion***, through the inclusion of a statement of principles.”
- The university does not seek merely to be compliant but to use internal and external reviews to be the basis of a ***continuous process of critical self review and enhancement***.

# Appeals: Principles

## ***Extract.***

- The University is responsible for providing procedures to ensure that students can, in good faith, request an academic review/appeal and be assured that they will ***not be penalised for so doing***, and that their request will be addressed fairly and promptly.
- Similarly, it is the responsibility of students in submitting such a request to ***behave responsibly*** and not to make unwarranted or unsubstantiated allegations concerning the personal or professional reputations or conduct of members of University staff.

# Appeals – Regulation 17

- There is a single Regulation (17) governing the procedure for appeals against academic judgements.
- This regulation identifies the **grounds**\* for submitting an academic appeal for both taught and research degrees, outlines the **timescales** involved and makes clear the **entitlement** to be accompanied or represented by an adviser or friend. [\* Extenuating circumstances; procedure; examiner(s) bias; incompatible philosophies]
- The Students' Union also offers support and publishes a guidance leaflet for students on this matter.

# Appeals - Monitoring

- Details of academic appeals are monitored at faculty/school level and summaries of all appeals and their outcomes are **annually scrutinised** at Council/Senate/Students Union Committee prior to consideration by Senate.
- Monitoring data include a **five year summary** of appeals, enabling trends to be tracked over time.
- There are **very few academic appeals** relating to PhD submissions
- There have been both successful and unsuccessful appeals

# Complaints: Principles

- The University seeks to minimise student complaints and grievances by ensuring that students have opportunities to **participate** in all the **formal decision-making processes** of the institution through representation on committees at programme, departmental, faculty and institutional levels.
- The University is also committed to providing an environment within which students **are encouraged to raise any matters of concern** in an informal manner as soon as they arise.
- Where complaints and grievances arise, the University is responsible for providing procedures to ensure that they are **addressed fairly and promptly** and that students can lodge their complaints and grievances, in good faith, with the assurance that **they will not be penalised for so doing**.
- The principle of **confidentiality** is maintained in any discussions involving a complaint.

# Complaints

- There is a **single** University document dealing with student complaints (QA39)
- QA39 details the **complete complaints procedures**, including **grievance** processes, as well as cross-referring to the separate academic appeals procedures and signposting other relevant policies such as those regarding Harassment and Public Interest Disclosure.
- The complaints procedures are referred to in the Postgraduate Handbook, departmental handbooks and Students' Union literature.

# Complaints

- Academic matters are monitored at a faculty/school level
- Non-academic complaints are monitored by the Head of Student Services
- Summaries of all student complaints / outcomes are ***examined annually*** by the Council/Senate/Student's Union Committee and Senate
- Very few formal complaints have been made by postgraduate research students
- They are usually resolved without the need for the complaint progressing beyond the faculty/school level

# Informal Routes to Resolution

1. Lead Supervisor
2. Supervisory team or other supervisor or Assessor (an independent academic involved in annual reviews who is often a future internal examiner)
3. Departmental/School Director of Studies for RPGs
4. Head of Department/School

***Research PG Ombudsman***

# Research PG Ombudsman

- The Ombudsman is available to give *impartial* and *confidential* advice to any research student with a *problem* (as distinct from just a formal ‘complaint’) that has not been resolved within a department or faculty/school, or where the student is uncomfortable with raising a concern at a local level.
- The Ombudsman maintains links with the Students’ Union and other parts of the University support system and problems are sometimes most appropriately addressed by referral to these other areas.

# Research PG Ombudsman

- The Ombudsman ***reports annually*** to both Senate and the University Research Students' Committee, outlining all matters that have been raised during the year.
- Up to a dozen cases, both old and new, may be seen in any one year but very few lead to formal complaints
- The Ombudsman has sometimes acted as an adviser on subsequent complaints / appeals.

# Conclusions

- There are relatively few complaints or appeals by RPGs
- Encouraging early informal communication of complaints facilitates their rapid resolution
- The PG Ombudsman seems to be an effective route for dealing with problems
- Having a single source for the documentation makes it more understandable for both students and staff
- The entire QA Code of Practice is currently being reviewed (2006 - 2008)
- Students are involved in the review processes



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