



Comments & Complaints Procedure

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Sabbatical responsible for interpretation: President

1.0 Introduction

Kent Union's policy is one of continuous improvement. In this spirit, it welcomes comments, compliments and suggestions for improvement and takes complaints seriously. Comments and compliments will be registered centrally and presented to the Finance and Staffing Sub-Committee (hereinafter referred to as F&SSC) and the Executive Committee periodically. The Complaints Procedure, being more complex, operates separately.

2.0 Comments

- 2.1 Comment boxes will be placed throughout Kent Union, including in: the Secretariat, Finance Office, Advice and Information, Campus Shop, Colours Café, Park Life shop, Venue Reception and the Lighthouse, the Student Development Unit and Woody's.
- 2.2 Comment boxes will be emptied regularly by the relevant department staff and handed to the Mandela reception staff who will compile a register of comments for F&SSC.
- 2.3 F&SSC will consider the comments and advise on any appropriate action. Where appropriate managers of the departments in question, along with the General Manager will be empowered by F&SSC to suggest and carry out action they deem appropriate. Feedback will also be given under the appropriate circumstances and in the most relevant timely format.

3.0 Complaints - Preamble

- 3.1 The purpose of this procedure is to make clear exactly how to go about making a complaint within Kent Union, and what will happen to a complaint after it has been made. Kent Union welcomes the opportunity of improving the services offered by listening and reacting to complaints in a prompt manner, and encourages students and customers to invoke this procedure if for any reason they feel it necessary.
- 3.2 Kent Union encourages any student to take a complaint informally to any full-time Sabbatical Officer, member of union staff or to a part-time Executive officer in the first instance. If for whatever reason it is felt that the complaint has not been dealt with satisfactorily, or if it is felt that this informal route is inappropriate, then the complainant should go on to the formal stages of this procedure.
- 3.3 If the formal complaints procedure is invoked by a student then the President, (or another Sabbatical in the event of the President being involved in the complaint), will report back to the Executive Committee at every stage, except where details need to be reserved, (e.g. because they involve members of Union staff, or because the complainant has requested that their details be kept confidential). Wherever possible, and with the complainant's permission, specific members of the Executive Committee will be invited to help with the investigation and provide any extra support to the complainant if necessary.
- 3.4 Any student who wishes to complain about a member of Kent Union staff, should refer to the "Staff Student Protocol".
- 3.5 At all times the complainant's name and contact details will be kept confidential within the parameters of the investigation into the complaint. After the final outcome of the complaint, the complainant's contact details will be disposed of and only the complainant's name will be kept in the Complaints File. Wherever possible the

complainant's name will be kept from any person against whom the complainant is making a complaint. If requested we can guarantee to keep the complainant's name from any such person; in certain circumstances, however, it may make investigation into a complaint more difficult, and possibly even impossible.

- 3.6 Students and customers should feel free to lodge a complaint if for any reason they feel Kent Union has failed in some aspect of its provision. A complaint could be made about an incident in a Union building, a Union service, or a Union Officer.
- 3.7 It is obviously impossible to predict what will happen in the case of every complaint, however the following should give the complainant an idea of possible outcomes if the complaint is upheld:
 - 3.7.1 If the complaint is about a fellow student of Kent Union, it will be referred to a Disciplinary Committee and the complainant will be informed of this Committee's decision.
 - 3.7.2 If the complaint is about a Sabbatical Officer and involves action within their elected remit, the complaint will be dealt with via the democratic forums (see Kent Union Constitution and Rules) and there will be no further stages of complaint in this instance. If, however, the complaint refers to the actions of an Officer as an ordinary student, then the complaint will be dealt with by the Disciplinary Committee.
 - 3.7.3 The complainant may receive an apology and an explanation for certain actions taken by Kent Union, its staff or members.
 - 3.7.4 The complainant may receive reimbursement for any money which may have been lost if Kent Union is at fault within policy boundaries.
 - 3.7.5 Kent Union will always endeavour to improve its own services and procedures if these are deemed to be at fault in a complaint.
- 3.8 Kent Union recognises that complaints within the organisation can take the form of a political complaint regarding the democratic environment of a Students' Union (examples include complaints regarding the behaviour of an officer of Kent Union or the decision of one of its democratic committees), or a complaint regarding service provision (examples include complaints regarding the dissatisfaction with the quality of service at any of Kent Union's commercial outlets). This procedure recognises the difference between the natures of these two forms of complaints and thus has designated two different routes to be followed in respect of the nature of the complaint.
- 3.9 If at any point advice is needed on a complaint, or if any part of this procedure is unclear, the complainant should see the Union President or the Union General Manager who will provide any help needed. In the event of the President being involved in the complaint, then any other Sabbatical Officer will provide the necessary help.

4.0 Political Complaints

4.1 Definition: Political complaints by definition are all those involving the behaviour and decisions of Kent Union members and political committees in their capacity as union representatives and decision-makers. These also include complaints concerning Kent Union's constitution, rules, democratic procedures and policies. Political complaints include, but are not restricted to:

- Complaints regarding the behaviour of a sabbatical or part-time executive officer.
- Complaints regarding the rules set out in the constitution.
- Complaints regarding the failure of the union executive committee to carry out a union policy.

4.2 Interpretation: If for any reason the complainant is unclear whether their complaint is a political complaint or not; the final interpretation of the form of complaint at hand will be the responsibility of the Union President or any other Sabbatical Officer in the case where the president is involved in the action leading to the complaint.

4.3 Political complaints - Formal Stages

4.3.1.1 In the case of a formal Political complaint, the complainant should refer firstly to the procedures and rules set down in Kent Union's Constitution and Rules.

4.3.1.2 The complainant should put their complaint in writing, in the form of a letter, sent to the Union Council committee by email to the Union Chair, copied to the Union President or hand delivered to the Mandela Building reception. The letter should include as much detail as possible, for example the date and timing of any incident, names of people involved and what the complainant sees as an appropriate outcome to the complaint. The complainant should also include their contact details. An acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint should be dispatched within 48 hours of receipt.

4.3.1.3 Complaints will be dealt through the channels specified in Kent Union's Constitution and Rules using the interpretation of the Union Chair. Political Complaints will be dealt with by the Union President, any other member of F&SSC, the Union Chair, or the Union Council committee where deemed appropriate by the Union Chair through consultation with the Union President and Union Council where appropriate.

4.3.1.4 The complainant should receive a written decision on whether the complaint has been upheld, with details of any action taken, within 5 working days.

4.3.1.5 If for any reason a decision could not be reached within 5 days of the receipt of the complaint (for example; in case of a need to wait for the next pre-scheduled council meeting), a notice to that regard will be dispatched within 5 working days of receipt. And a further notice every 5 working days thereof, until a decision has been made.

5.0 Non-Political Complaints

5.1 Definition: Non-political complaints are all those complaints not relating to any of the Union's democratic structures, elected officers and representatives, constitution, rules, policies and procedures. The most common of a non-political complaint will involve complaints about the quality of a service tendered by the Union or the behaviour of a member of Union staff while providing that service. Non-Political complaints include, but are not limited to:

- Complaints regarding the level of service provision in any department of Kent Union.
- Complaints regarding the price, quality or availability of service at Kent Union retail outlets or licensed trade premises.
- Complaints regarding the availability and scope of services offered at non-commercial departments of Kent Union (such as JobShop or the reception at the Mandela reception).
- Complaints regarding the behaviour and attitude of staff members in any department of Kent Union.

5.2 Interpretation: If for any reason the complainant is unclear about the nature of their complaint (whether classed as a political or non-political). The final interpretation of the form of complaint at hand will be the responsibility of the Union President or any other Sabbatical Officer in the case where the President is involved in the action leading to the complaint.

5.3 Formal Stages

5.3.1 Stage one

5.3.1.1 The initial complaint should be given to the Outlet Manager (or staff member responsible for the service) who will investigate it fully. An acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint will be dispatched within 48 hours of receipt.

5.3.1.2 The complainant should receive a written decision on whether the complaint has been upheld, with details of any action taken, within 5 working days.

5.3.1.3 If for any reason a decision has not been taken within 5 working days, the complainant will receive an update explaining what progress has been made, within this period, and every further 5 working days, until a decision has been made.

5.3.1.4 If at any point the complainant is dissatisfied with the treatment of their complaint, *subject to the test of reasonableness*, they may go on to Stage Two of the procedure.

5.3.2 Stage two

5.3.2.1 The complainant should prepare another letter, detailing the original points of the complaint, but also including any reasons they have for being dissatisfied with the initial response. This complaint should be submitted to the Business Development Manager of the Union in the case of a complaint concerning a commercial outlet, and to the department senior manager in the case of a non-commercial

department (please refer to Kent Union's senior management structure).

5.3.2.2 The Senior Manager will investigate the evidence previously collated and ensure that the correct procedures have been followed.

5.3.2.3 The complainant should receive a written decision on whether the complaint has been upheld, with details of any action taken, within 5 working days.

5.3.2.4 If for any reason a decision has not been taken within 5 working days, the complainant will receive an update explaining what progress has been made, and one every further 10 working days, until a decision has been made.

5.3.2.5 If at any point the complainant is dissatisfied with the treatment of the complaint, *subject to the test of reasonableness*, the complainant may go on to Stage Three of the procedure.

5.3.3 Stage three

5.3.3.1 If the complainant is still *reasonably* dissatisfied with the treatment of the complaint, the complainant may take their complaint to the General Manager of the Union.

5.3.3.2 The General Manager will investigate the evidence previously collated and ensure that the correct procedures have been followed.

5.3.3.3 The complainant should receive a written decision on whether the complaint has been upheld, with details of any action taken, within 10 working days.

5.3.3.4 If for any reason a decision has not been taken within 10 working days, the complainant will receive an update explaining what progress has been made, and every further 10 working days, until a decision has been made.

5.3.3.5 If at any point the complainant is dissatisfied with the treatment of the complaint, *subject to the test of reasonableness*, the complainant may go on to Stage Four of the procedure.

5.3.4 Stage Four

5.3.4.1 If the complainant is still *reasonably* dissatisfied with the treatment of the complaint, the complainant may take their complaint to F&SSC through the executive committee or a sabbatical officer.

5.3.4.2 The complainant should prepare a letter detailing the original complaint along with the reasons why he/she is dissatisfied with the results of the three earlier stages; it should be noted that there must be a significant reason why the complaint merits going this far.

5.3.4.3 The complaint will be dealt with under open business in an F&SSC meeting except in the following circumstances, when it will be dealt with under closed business:

- If the complainant has requested anonymity.
- If the result of the complaint is likely to result in a member of the Union being referred to the Disciplinary Committee.
- If the complaint is in regards to a sabbatical officer or a member of Union staff.

5.3.4.4 The complaint will be brought up as an agenda item, and the Committee will decide how to proceed with it. A subcommittee of F&SSC can be formed to investigate the complaint further. It should be noted that the decision of F&SSC is final. In the case that F&SSC feels that the complaint reasonably warrants further discussion or action, this would include being discussed as an item at the next appropriate Students' Council.

5.3.4.5 An acknowledgement of the receipt of the complaint, together with the outcome of F&SSC's decision, will be dispatched immediately after the meeting. No further course of action can be taken following F&SSC's or Students' Council decision and/or investigation.

6.0 Abuse of the Complaints Policy

The procedure laid out in this document is at all times subject to a requirement of reasonableness. Any person found to abuse the Complaints Policy, for example by deliberately making clearly false accusations against a member of staff, will be disciplined by Kent Union through the Student Disciplinary Procedure.