

SOAS SU Complaints procedure

The Students Union and the school have separate complaints procedures. The student Union procedure is available to any member of the union or opted-out student wishing to make a complaint or lodge a grievance against the Union, the Union Trustees (including the co-presidents), students union staff, against any organisation within the Union (such as a club or society), or against any member of the union. This shall include any complaint arising from the Union election procedure, subject to the election rules as laid out in the Constitution and Schedules. Complaints brought shall be within the limits of the Membership Section.

The procedure allows any student, group of students or other member of SOAS students union or an individual or group within SOAS students union, relating to their treatment by SOAS students union, relating their treatment by anyone acting on behalf of SOAS students union or if they feel they have been unfairly disadvantaged by having exercised the right to opt of membership of SOAS students union

The Governance and Communications officer will be monitoring the whole complaints process. If a member of the students union wishes to bring a complaint against the General Manager, the member shall invoke the school's complaints procedure.

Should the Governance and communications officer be under investigation, their role will be replaced by a staff member of the student union who is not involved with the case.

Complaints against all SOAS SU staff (full time, part time and voluntary) shall be investigated under the SOAS SU Staff complaints procedure.

Complaints monitoring

There will be an annual report delivered to the School and the board of trustees to address the issues identified within the year's complaints. The aim will be to identify key issues as well as propose improvements for the conduct in the SU. All information will be anonymised.

Exclusions

This complaints system will also not cover the following issues:

- Requests for new or different services
- Harassment and bullying. Such issues should be raised with the Diversity and Inclusion Office via diversity@soas.ac.uk.
- Academic decisions. Such issues should be raised with Registry at SOAS via registrar@soas.ac.uk
- Disciplinary or misconduct procedures should be raised with through the Compliance Officer at SOAS via albert.chan@soas.ac.uk.
- Financial matters that are not related to the Students Union should be raised with the Compliance Officer at SOAS via albert.chan@soas.ac.uk.
- Staff grievance procedures-
- Complaints by students on franchised programmes at other institutions
- A complaint made by an alumni of SOAS or a member of public that is not related to activities and events organised by the Students Union as well as members of the student union body such as sabbatical officers, Students Union staff or members of student union sports clubs and societies.

-A complaint relating to the food, drinks and entertainment managed by the SU should be dealt separately by the general manager who can be contacted via su@soas.ac.uk.

-General feedback and enquiries can be made at suadvice@soas.ac.uk.

- The SOAS SU is a charity that strives to use its funds fairly and proportionately. For this reason the SU Complaints procedure will not investigate trivial, misjudged, hypothetical, repetitive or vexatious complaints that are unsupported by lack of evidence.

Objectives and expectations of the complaints procedure

-The SU complaints procedure aims to provide clarity for the complainant on the roles and responsibilities within the SU.

- To seek to resolve complaints through informal resolution at the earliest stage of the process.

-To provide a transparent and objective platform, adopting best practice for all parties involved in the complaints process.

- To welcome complaints to the SU for the purpose of improving services where necessary.

The SU complaints procedure will deal with all complaints confidentially, fairly and independently. The SU will aim to resolve the issue respectfully for all parties involved.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All data and information collected within complaints cases will be dealt with confidentially during the investigation. On extremely rare cases SU staff will have to break confidentiality (Please see the SU Confidentiality Policy for further information). All parties involved in the complaints are expected to abide by this and should any confidentiality be breached then it will become a disciplinary issue. All information will be stored securely and will be destroyed after 6 years.

Process of making a complaint

When making a complaint please be sure to include the following information

- The allegation (s) – please include as much information such as the date, time, location, witnesses and names
- Potential evidence that can support your case.
- What outcome you would like from the complaint.
- Anonymous complaints will not be investigated but instead be taken up as feedback for the SU.

Informal Review

It will be advised students should attempt to resolve their concerns with direct resolution through either speaking or writing to the individual(s) that's caused the grievance. The individual(s) who have allegedly caused the grievance should be given the opportunity to respond.

Should the student continue to be dissatisfied with the outcome from the direct resolution, or, if this approval is to be inappropriate or impractical, the student can attempt to resolve the complaint through the informal stage.

Direct resolution should take no longer than 10 working days from when the concern was initially raised. Should the situation take longer to be resolved the student will be advised to make an informal complaint.

Should a complaint arise against all Co-presidents, a part time officer will be elected to investigate. Should the complainant feel uncomfortable with those elected to investigate the complaint, they must provide valid grounds for this.

The complainant can also contact either the general manager and or the academic and welfare adviser as an alternative option should they not want the co-presidents and or the part time officers to be involved.

If the decision is made that the co-presidents and part time officers should not investigate the case, then the general manager will pass the case over to the school that would elect an impartial member to investigate the case.

Representation by the Students' Union

Should students want representation and or student Union presence within cases being handled by the School, A sabbatical officer or SU staff member will be able to attend such hearings. Students will need to give at least the SU at least 2 days' notice. The SU officers and staff will not attend meetings and hearings which they have not had the time to assess the case.

Informal Stage

If a student or group wishes to make a complaint, they shall initiate the informal stage by taking all reasonable steps first to resolve the matter informally and locally. An Elected co-president and SOAS SU staff member shall, depending on the nature of the complaint, investigate the complaint at an informal level. The outcome can take up to 10 working days.

Should a complaint be made against a co- president, an elected part time officer along with a SOAS SU staff member shall be called to investigate the case informally. Where there is a complaint made against all full time or part time staff, the elected co-president with a SOAS SU staff member shall also investigate the case informally.

If the case rises of an informal complaint against all co-presidents and all part time officers, a member or staff of the student union who has not been involved with the case shall be nominated to investigate the complaint.

The relevant investigators will send the outcome of their investigation to the relevant people involved in the investigation in writing.

Examples of remedies as recommended during this stage could be the following

- An apology
- Mediation between all parties involved
- Removing and/or cancelling materials/events by the SU sports clubs and societies.

Depending on the nature of the case some complaints made through the students union could also involve the investigation of other parties for example;

- A disciplinary matter in which case SOAS University will also investigate
- Potential misconduct within the school where the school will also have the right to investigate as well as other external institutions such as the Police.

Formal Stage

Where the procedures set out so far fail to satisfy the complainant or where the matter is in any case deemed sufficiently serious by the elected co president to meet more formal consideration, the written complaint shall be taken forward as a formal complaint.

The elected co-president or part time officer alongside a SOAS SU staff member is responsible for the formal investigation of complaints in the student union. The formal stage should be concluded within 20 working days. Additional time of 10 working days can be permitted for the appeal procedure. The elected investigators will inform in writing all parties about the complaint detailing any actions proposed at earlier stages and any outcomes from those actions. The report should include a proposed resolution such as offering an apology to the student. The report could also state the grounds of why the complaint has been rejected. An example of this could be that the complaint was identified as being vexatious e.g.

- A complaint which has already been dealt with by either the Students Union or the school and the case has been closed.
- A complaint that has been identified as solely having the intention of harassing or subduing others involved.

Formal complaints should be in writing and include the following:

- Name and student email address
- Their programme and year of study
- Details about the complaint
- Details and evidence of their attempts to resolve the complaint through direct resolution and what the outcome was.
- What they would like as an outcome of the complaint.

Appeal Procedure

If the complainant/s remains dissatisfied after all informal and formal student union procedures, the complainant/s may appeal the decision to an appeals panel which will consist of a panel of 3 individuals such as staff members of the SOAS SU , SOAS university staff, sabbatical officers from external universities or staff members from external students unions and/or universities.

Any appeal must be made in writing within 5 working days of the union panel's notification of its decision and must give specific grounds for appeal. No new evidence will be accepted at this point. The appeal should detail the procedures followed to date, enclosing the necessary papers, and must give the precise grounds for appeal.

Completion of Procedures

Once the complaints application has been completed when a decision of rejecting or upholding the complaints, the Students' Union will provide all parties with a completion of procedures letter summarising the case outcome.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the result of the appeal procedure, the matter may be referred to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/> .

Withdrawal of Complaint

All complainants have a right to withdraw a complaint at any stage of the process. This must be requested written and submitted to suadvice@soas.ac.uk. The SU will assess the information submitted to identify any potential legal risks and responsibilities. Should the SU believe there still to be some risk involved then the SU will have the right to continue the investigation.