

# Procedures for the handling of education-related complaints from students

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Background .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Limitations .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Functions and activities handling general complaints and comments .....</b>	<b>2</b>
3.1	Handling of complaints and comments – part of improvement work .....	2
3.2	Examination representatives .....	3
3.3	Course evaluations .....	3
3.4	Student and doctoral student survey .....	3
3.5	Local agreement on collaboration for development – SSG .....	3
3.6	Central health and safety representatives .....	3
3.7	The student unions and the doctoral student officer .....	4
3.8	General complaints and information .....	4
<b>4</b>	<b>Handling of complaints in individual cases .....</b>	<b>4</b>
4.1	Handling of complaints .....	4
4.2	Handling of complaints at course or supervisor level, department and faculty level – steps 1–3 .....	4
4.2.1	Handling of complaints in first- and second-cycle education .....	4
4.2.2	Handling of complaints in third-cycle education .....	5
4.3	Handling of complaints at vice-chancellor level – step 4 .....	6
4.4	Appeals or complaints to supervisory authorities .....	7
<b>5</b>	<b>Processing time for complaints .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Entry into force .....</b>	<b>8</b>

## **1 Background**

According to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), student-centred learning and teaching must have appropriate procedures for dealing with student complaints (see Standard 1.3).<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the procedures is to clarify how a student who has a complaint against the University regarding education-related issues can proceed and how such a complaint is to be handled within the University (LiU). In these procedures, a student refers to a person who is admitted to and participates in first-, second- and third-cycle education (see Chapter 1, Section 4 of the Higher Education Ordinance [1993:100]).

## **2 Limitations**

These procedures do not apply to the handling of decisions against which an appeal may be brought, cases of correction and amendment (reassessment) of decisions, disciplinary matters, misconduct matters, personnel responsibility matters, cases of deviation from good research practice or cases of discrimination and harassment. Such cases are instead processed in accordance with the following guidelines or procedures:

- Guidelines for appeals
- Guidelines for the handling of deviations from good research practice
- Rules of procedure of the Staff Disciplinary Board
- Rules of procedure of the Disciplinary Board
- Guidelines for the handling of suspected harassment, sexual harassment and victimisation
- Correction and amendment (reassessment) of grading decisions are made in accordance with the procedures of the respective department.

## **3 Functions and activities handling general complaints and comments**

### **3.1 Handling of complaints and comments – part of improvement work**

Sections 3.2–3.8 provide information about the functions and activities at LiU for the handling of general complaints or comments about educational operations. These functions and activities are an important part of LiU's improvement process to guide students, provide information and handle shortcomings identified during the course of education.

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<sup>1</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). (2015). Brussels, Belgium.

### **3.2 Examination representatives**

For general questions about examination there is an examination representative at each faculty. Examination representatives cannot review the examiner's decision, but can provide guidance for students on how to proceed.

### **3.3 Course evaluations**

Comments on a particular course are primarily handled through the course evaluation that is carried out after a course has been completed. The comments expressed in the course evaluation and any measures that these give rise to are to be conveyed to the students by the course coordinator.

### **3.4 Student and doctoral student survey**

Complaints or comments regarding, for example, premises, work environment, equal opportunities, student influence and service are followed up comprehensively in a student and doctoral student survey conducted every two years at LiU. The purpose of the survey is to find out what the students think about their study situation. The views expressed in the student and doctoral student survey are handled by different parts of the University, depending on what the views concern. The results of the surveys and the measures taken are followed up together with the student unions.

### **3.5 Local agreement on collaboration for development – SSG**

Each department must have a Student Liason Group (SSG). The SSG deals with issues related to the courses given at the department and concerns questions about how the courses are organised and how they are implemented, how the results of evaluations are to be processed, and issues related to the students' work environment, environment and equal opportunities. The SSG consists of the head of department or an appointee of the head of department as well as student representatives appointed by the relevant student unions. Identified problems, possible measures and feedback to students are covered at SSG meetings.

### **3.6 Central health and safety representatives**

Each student union has a central health and safety representative (CAMO-stud). The central health and safety representatives work mainly with questions concerning the physical work environment, but can also deal with questions concerning psychosocial and other aspects of student welfare. The CAMO-stud collaborates at the central level primarily with Student Health and University Services and coordinates the work of the appointed health and safety representatives (AMO-stud) in the sections. The AMO-stud represents the students in a particular section. Under agreements with trade union partners, the Central Collaboration Group (CSG) a couple of times per semester includes CAMO-stud when issues concerning the students are addressed. In the matter of the working environment of doctoral students, the employed doctoral students, like other

employees, are represented by the union health and safety representatives. Doctoral students who are not employed are represented by CAMO-Stud.

### **3.7 The student unions and the doctoral student officer**

Students can always turn to the student unions for help and support in the handling of student affairs. All unions have a function that is tasked with handling questions regarding education and quality of education. For all doctoral students, there is also a doctoral student officer who can give general advice on handling issues related to the conducting of doctoral studies.

### **3.8 General complaints and information**

General complaints, questions and comments can be submitted to Infocenter by telephone, in person or via the contact form available on the LiU website. It is also possible for students to contact Infocenter for guidance on where to turn. Information about where students can turn with different types of questions can also be found on LiU's web page "Student rights and obligations". It is also possible to get guidance and information from study advisers.

## **4 Handling of complaints in individual cases**

### **4.1 Handling of complaints**

For complaints that relate to individual cases, but do not relate to such cases as described in Section 2 and cannot be handled using the functions or activities described in Section 3, the following four-step complaint handling procedure applies to education-related issues. Complaints covered by these procedures may include, for example, supervision, treatment from teachers, timetabling, quality of education, processing times, the possibility to influence education, a local rule not being followed by an employee or a supervisor change not being completed within a reasonable time.

### **4.2 Handling of complaints at course or supervisor level, department and faculty level – steps 1–3**

#### **4.2.1 Handling of complaints in first- and second-cycle education**

##### *Step 1 – handling at course level*

A student who believes that the University has handled a case in violation of the applicable rules should in the first instance contact the relevant teacher or the course coordinator. In many cases, the issue can be resolved at this level.

##### *Step 2 – handling at department level*

If the student considers that the issue has not been resolved in step 1, the student should turn to the director of studies or the head of directors of studies, where one is appointed, or alternatively to the head of division at the department concerned.

The documentation provided to the person concerned at the department should contain

- a description of the problem or incident on which the complaint is based
- an account of how the problem has been handled in step 1 and by whom.

The person responsible for handling of the case at the department according to the previous paragraph shall contact the person who has handled the case in step 1 to examine the complaint received. The person responsible at the department shall document and register their assessment of the matter and convey this to the student and to the person who has dealt with the case in step 1. In cases where the issue can be resolved in dialogue with the student, the issue is considered to have been resolved.

#### *Step 3 – handling at faculty level*

In cases where the issue is not resolved in step 2 and needs further investigation, the person responsible at the department (see step 2) shall contact the dean or pro-dean for first-cycle education concerned to ensure that the issue is also examined by the faculty. The dean or pro-dean should contact the relevant programme coordinator or board of studies if the complaint concerns a programme.

If the student considers that the issue has not been resolved at the department level, the student can independently raise the matter with the dean or pro-dean for first-cycle education.

The dean or pro-dean for first-cycle education shall document and register their assessment of the case and convey this to the student and the relevant person responsible at the department. In cases where the issue can be resolved in dialogue with the student, the issue is considered to have been resolved. In cases where the issue is not resolved and needs further investigation, the student can contact the vice-chancellor, see step 4 under Section 4.3.

#### 4.2.2 Handling of complaints in third-cycle education

##### *Step 1 – handling at supervisor level*

A student who believes that the University has handled a case in violation of the applicable rules should in the first instance contact the relevant teacher or the supervisor at the relevant department. In many cases, the issue can be resolved at this level.

##### *Step 2 – handling at department level*

If the student considers that the issue has not been resolved in step 1, the student should turn to the director of doctoral studies (FUS) at the relevant department. If the student is employed, they can also contact the head of the relevant division in the department. The documentation provided to the person concerned at the department should contain

- a description of the problem or incident on which the complaint is based

- an account of how the problem has been handled in step 1 and by whom.

The person responsible for handling of the case at the department according to the previous paragraph shall contact the person who has handled the case in step 1 to examine the complaint received. The person responsible at the department shall document and register their assessment of the matter and convey this to the student and to the person who has handled the matter in step 1. In cases where the issue can be resolved in dialogue with the student, the issue is considered to have been resolved.

#### *Step 3 – handling at faculty level*

In cases where the issue is not resolved in step 2 and needs further investigation, the person responsible at the department (see step 2) shall contact the dean or pro-dean for third-cycle education concerned to ensure that the issue is also examined by the faculty.

If the student considers that the issue has not been resolved at the department level, the student can independently raise the matter with the dean or pro-dean for research and third-cycle education.

The dean or pro-dean for research and third-cycle education shall document and register their assessment of the case and convey this to the student and the relevant person responsible at the department. In cases where the issue can be resolved in dialogue with the student, the issue is considered to have been resolved. In cases where the issue is not resolved and needs further investigation, the student can contact the vice-chancellor, see step 4 under Section 4.3.

### **4.3 Handling of complaints at vice-chancellor level – step 4**

If the student considers that the problem remains unresolved, despite being processed in accordance with steps 1–3, the student can take up their complaint with the vice-chancellor. The student must have attempted to solve the problem in the first instance at course or supervisor level, in the second at department level and thirdly at faculty level in order for the complaint to be admissible for review by the vice-chancellor.

The request for review by the vice-chancellor must be made in writing and addressed to the vice-chancellor or submitted to the registrar. The request to the vice-chancellor should include the following:

- A description of the problem or incident on which the complaint is based.
- An account of how the problem has been managed in steps 1, 2 and 3, including documentation from the person responsible at the department and faculty respectively.
- A description of what the student considers to be incorrect in the assessments made by the person responsible at the department and faculty respectively.

- Information about who at department and faculty level the student has been in contact with and a timeline of when different meetings or contacts have taken place.

The vice-chancellor shall have the case investigated and appoint an appropriate case manager, taking into account the nature of the case. The vice-chancellor will thereafter make a decision. In cases where the vice-chancellor considers that there are deficiencies in the handling of the case at department or faculty level, the relevant subordinate body may be required to take measures to correct the errors. The vice-chancellor may also change the decision independently. If the vice-chancellor considers that the subordinate bodies have dealt with the matter correctly, the vice-chancellor will make a decision to dismiss the case without further action.

#### **4.4 Appeals or complaints to supervisory authorities**

These procedures do not prevent a student from appealing a decision in accordance with Chapter 12 of the Higher Education Ordinance or turning to any authority that regulates the University.

If a student is not satisfied with the University's handling of their case, the student can turn to the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) with a request to investigate the matter. However, UKÄ has made it clear that the authority will not investigate a complaint from a student if the student has not tried to solve the problem in dialogue with the relevant higher education institution up to the level of vice-chancellor.<sup>2</sup>

### **5 Processing time for complaints**

Under Section 9 of the Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900, FL), a case must be processed as simply, quickly and cost-effectively as possible without neglecting the rule of law. However, the concrete meaning of these requirements for the processing of a case is not more specifically regulated, instead an assessment must be made in each individual case. A benchmark for this type of complaint handling can be a maximum of about 6 weeks for each level. If the complaint needs to be dealt with at the vice-chancellor level, the vice-chancellor may in such case make a decision on the case within six months of the initiation of the case. If a case has not been resolved within six months, a party may request in writing that LiU shall decide the matter (Section 12, FL).

If a student has comments on the processing time for a complaint case, the student should in the first instance contact the relevant case officer. If comments remain after such contact, the student can contact the case officer's manager.

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<sup>2</sup> UKÄ. *Complaints about higher education institutions*, retrieved 22 January 2025, <https://www.uka.se/for-studenter/studenters-rattssakerhet/anmalan-mot-larosate>.

## **6 Entry into force**

These procedures will enter into force on 19 February 2025.