



Policy and Procedure for Complaints and Review Requests About the Applications Process and the Outcome of an Application (For All Programmes of Study at Union School of Theology)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Union School of Theology wants all applicants to have a positive experience in proceeding through our application process. We will make every endeavour to provide you with the information you require and support you to make an informed choice in regard to the best programme of study for you. However, if you are not satisfied about the handling of your application, you do have the right to make a complaint or request a review.

The UST Complaints Officer is the Academic Registrar and can be contacted at academicregistrar@ust.ac.uk

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

This policy has been developed in accordance with the following regulations, policies and procedures. This list is not exhaustive:

- Union School of Theology [BA](#), [GDip](#) and [MTh](#) Student Handbook
- [Union School of Theology Recognised Prior Learning Policy](#)
- [Union School of Theology Admissions Policy](#)
- [Union School of Theology Data Protection Policy](#)
- [Union School of Theology Equal Opportunities Policy](#)
- [QAA 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B2: Recruitment, selection and admissions to higher education'](#)
- [Open University Handbook for Validated Awards](#)
- [UK Visa and Immigration documentation](#)

1. DEFINITION OF COMPLAINT AND REVIEW

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with either the service we have provided or the lack of a service. It must relate to services that you were led to believe would be provided.

A review is a request for a reconsideration of the decision to refuse your application. There are only certain grounds on which a review can be requested, and such a review may not question the academic judgement of academic staff.

3. PRINCIPLES OF POLICY

3.1 We aim to respond to any enquiry or complaint confidentially, fairly and promptly. Staff undertake to be courteous to the complainant, responding positively and, wherever possible, offering constructive solutions.

3.2 Informal complaints will be acknowledged within 7 calendar days and investigated, wherever possible within 14 calendar days of receiving all the relevant information and the Provost notified. Formal written complaints should be recorded, acknowledged within 7 calendar days, investigated and a response given, wherever possible, within 30 calendar days of receiving all the relevant information.

3.3 No-one will be disadvantaged by making a complaint.

3.4 The complaint may be withdrawn without prejudice at any time during the process.

4. ACCEPTABLE GROUNDS FOR COMPLAINT

4.1 For Making a Complaint about how your application was handled:

- a. the decision made contradicts the published admissions criteria;
- b. there was unlawful discrimination against you during the applications process;
- c. there was an administrative error in the handling of the application;

4.2 For Requesting a Review: The only grounds for requesting a review of the decision to deny your application is if there were mitigating circumstances the School was unaware of at the time it made its decision.

5. UNACCEPTABLE GROUNDS

There is no right of appeal for applications where:

- a. the dispute concerns academic judgement;
- b. the dispute concerns a decision already accepted by the applicant;
- c. the request would contravene government regulations or any contract with external organisations, such as validating university;
- d. the application was for a previous academic year.

6. PROCEDURE: HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

6.1 INFORMAL COMPLAINT

- a. If you have a complaint about *the way your application was handled*, you should contact the UST admissions staff. In the first instance this will be dealt with informally by contacting and communicating with the relevant staff who dealt with the application. They will endeavour to deal with your concerns promptly, fairly and impartially. You will be informed of the outcome as quickly as possible and we hope that you will feel that your concern has been addressed and resolved satisfactorily.
- b. However, you must make your informal complaint within 30 days of the incident which gave rise to complaint or the date that you received the result of your application.

6.2 FORMAL COMPLAINT

If you are still unhappy *about the way your application was handled*, or if you prefer, you may wish to make a formal complaint. You must do this within 7 calendar days of receiving our response to your informal complaint, or within 30 days of the incident

which gave rise to the complaint or the date that you received the result of your application. To make a complaint you must:

- a. Complete the *Applications Process Complaints Form*, which can be found as an appendix to this document and on the UST website: www.ust.ac.uk
- b. Please express your concerns clearly and succinctly and provide evidence to substantiate the issues raised wherever possible. Such evidence may include independent medical evidence, reports by professionals, financial information or witness statements.
- c. The completed and *signed* form, together with all your supporting evidence, should be sent to the Complaints Officer (paper or electronic copies are acceptable).
- d. All complaints will be managed in a confidential and sensitive way. Whilst it is understood that you may wish some evidence (e.g. a witness statement or medical evidence) to remain confidential, this may not always be possible without hampering a thorough investigation of the facts. In these circumstances therefore the School will discuss with the complainant the best way to approach the submission of evidence before releasing all or some of the evidence to the investigating officer or any others involved in the investigation.
- e. If a complaint involves more than one issue which do not fall neatly into one category of complaint, the School will discuss with you the best way to proceed in order to resolve all the issues as quickly and fairly as possible. This may, in some cases, involve resolving one complaint before dealing with another.
- f. On receipt of the complaint by the Complaints Officer, they will arrange a formal investigation. This will normally be led by the Programme Leader of the programme to which you were applying. Should your complaint be directly against him or her, then the complaint will be investigated by the Academic Dean. The formal investigation will take place, after which you will be informed in writing of the outcome and the reasons for the decision. We aim to respond within 30 days of receiving all relevant information.

7. PROCEDURE: HOW TO SEEK A REVIEW OF THE DECISION ABOUT YOUR COMPLAINT

7.1 GROUNDS FOR REVIEW

If you feel that UST did not take into account certain mitigating circumstances of which it was unaware when dealing with your complaint about your application, or did not follow proper process in handling the appeal, you may wish to seek a *review* of the decision about your complaint.

7.2 FORMAL REVIEW

- a. If you wish to request a formal review, this must be done within 14 calendar days of receiving our response to your appeal.
- b. You will need to submit a signed and completed *Formal Review form* to the Complaints Officer. This form is attached as an appendix to this document and it can also be found on the UST website: www.ust.ac.uk
- c. Explain on the form how or why you feel your request for a review fulfils one of the above grounds. Disagreement with the outcome is not sufficient grounds for a review of the decision.
- d. Provide any additional supporting evidence with, where appropriate, an explanation of why this was not submitted with the original application or with the appeal. Without a reasonable explanation, further evidence will not be accepted.
- e. Following the receipt of the specific review request the Complaints Officer will investigate and determine whether you have any valid grounds for a review. This will usually be done within 7 working days.
- f. Should there be proven grounds, The Complaints Officer will arrange for a committee of academic and administrative staff to consider the review usually within 30 calendar days of agreeing that there is a valid case to answer.
- g. Minutes will be taken.
- h. You will be informed and given the reasons should there prove to be any unavoidable delay.
- i. Usually within 30 days of the review request being received you will be informed of the outcome of the review in writing, and with the reasons for the decision given. At the same time, be informed of any further appeal process which may still be available to you.
- j. If mitigating circumstances have been proven, undergraduate applicants may be invited for a second interview with a different member of academic staff.
- k. If mitigating circumstances have been proven, Postgraduate applicants may be required to submit documents for assessment by a different member of academic staff. They may also be required to come for an interview with a member of the Postgraduate team. An example of a mitigating circumstance might be personal health or family bereavement.

7.3. APPEAL TO THE VALIDATING UNIVERSITY

If you still believe your complaint has not been fairly considered, and you have exhausted all UST's procedures, you may have the right to address a formal appeal to the university, which is the validating authority for the School's graduate and

postgraduate programmes. This must be done within 3 months of the outcome of our final appeal process. The criteria for an appeal are set out in the OU Handbook for Validated Awards, Appendix 3. This is posted in the Validating University section of the student area on the UST Cloud (VLE) and on the UST website at www.ust.ac.uk

Alternatively you can contact the Open University directly by email: OUVP-Director@open.ac.uk, by phone: 01908 332840 or by post: The Director, Centre for Inclusion and collaborative Partnerships, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.

As the awarding institution OU is responsible for ensuring that procedures for dealing with complaints are carried out fairly. The decision of the validating university will be final.

8. RESPONSIBILITIES, POLICY APPROVAL AND UPDATING

8.1 The Provost, Academic Dean, Programme Leaders and Admissions staff have overall responsibility for the admissions policy, including its approval and annual review.

8.2 The Programme Leaders and Admissions staff have responsibility for overseeing the admissions process and ensuring that decision making complies with Open University regulations.

8.3 This document, as well as all other policy, procedure and guidance documents relating to students studying at UST will be available to all, monitored regularly and reviewed and evaluated periodically.

9. POLICY COMMUNICATION

9.1 This document can be found on the Union Cloud VLE and on the UST website: www.ust.ac.uk

9.2 Every effort will be made to respond to any request to provide this policy in a different format.

9.3 This policy will be included in staff induction.

APPLICATIONS PROCESS COMPLAINTS FORM

Name:		:	
Preferred email contact details:			
Do you have a disability or additional learning need you would like us to be aware of when considering your appeal?		Yes/No (circle). If yes, please give details of adjustments that will assist you.	
Which Programme does your Applications' Complaint relate to?:	<input type="checkbox"/> BA <input type="checkbox"/> G. Dip. <input type="checkbox"/> M. Th. <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state)		
Informal Complaint: Have you raised the concerns informally in the first instance? If yes, please say who with and when:	Yes/No (circle) When and with whom (if applicable)		
Have you also submitted any other complaint or appeal at the same time as this complaint?	Yes/No (circle) When and with whom (if applicable)		
Which Area of the Applications Process or Decision does the Complaint Relate to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the decision made contradicts the published entry criteria; b. there was unlawful discrimination against you in the process; c. there was an administrative error in the handling of the application; 			
List any documents you are attaching to support your complaint e.g. academic, evidence of administrative error, etc.			

What are you looking for as an outcome (remedy)? (A requested remedy will be considered but cannot be guaranteed.)			
Do you have any suggestions for change so that this situation could be avoided in the future?		Yes please	No thanks
Do you have anyone to support you with this complaint?			
Signed (Student)		Date:	

NEXT STEP

1. Have you completed all sections of this form?
2. Have you included all supporting documents (if appropriate)?

Have you followed the correct procedure for making the appeal set out in the 'Policy and Procedure For Complaints About the Applications Process and the Outcome of

an Application' (For All Programmes Of Study At Union School Of Theology) which is located on the Union Cloud VLE and on the website: www.ust.ac.uk.

This document tells you:

- a. Which procedure will be used to judge your complaint
 - b. The permissible grounds for your complaint
 - c. Any time limits relevant to your complaint
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3. You should send this completed and signed form on to the UST Complaints Officer (the Academic Registrar) academicregistrar@ust.ac.uk