

### SRAC Complaints' Policy and Principles

Sheffield Regional Assessment Centre (SRAC) is committed to providing high quality education and services to all students using its services. It aims to provide a supportive environment and to be responsive to concerns when they are raised. SRAC welcomes the views of its users and continuously improve our service based on feedback. However, we recognise that you may feel dissatisfied with an aspect of your experience at SRAC. It is our policy that such concerns are dealt with in a fair and transparent way that respects the rights of all individuals involved. The SRAC Complaints' Procedure outlines the way in which complaints will be dealt with.

SRAC can only consider complaints on the grounds of incorrect process or infringement of the operating principles of the Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group, as published in the *Assessment Centre Quality Assurance Framework,* a document available at [www.dsa-qag.org.uk](http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk) *.*

# General Principles

## Scope and eligibility

The SRAC Complaints Procedure may be used by any student to express dissatisfaction relating to an experience of gaining a Needs Assessment; a Review Assessment, or in requesting an additional item of support from DSA.

Apart from complaints received by funding bodies, (as outlined above) SRAC does not normally accept complaints made by a third party, e.g. a parent or teacher. If you need someone else to make a complaint on your behalf you should write to us, giving your permission and explain why you cannot make the complaint yourself.

## Time Limits

You must submit your complaint within 20 working days of the incident, event or matters over which you are complaining. Exceptionally SRAC may accept a complaint review outside this period, and extend the time limit, but only if there is good reason to do so. In any case, complainants should be aware that a significant elapse of time might prejudice proper investigation and the potential for resolving a complaint. For example, relevant staff may leave, and recollections of events may be impaired over time. If, such delay and circumstances arise the University may not be able to address fully (or at all) the issues you have raised.

## Fair dealing

Your complaint will be handled with due discretion by staff in SRAC and/or Sheffield Hallam University, in a professional and non-confrontational manner. SRAC reserves the right to investigate the authenticity of any documents submitted (e.g. medical papers) in support of a complaint. Any parties in a complaint have the right of response.

Those investigating or adjudicating upon a complaint will do so impartially. Anyone with a material personal interest in the complaint will neither investigate nor adjudicate.

## Meetings

In most cases there will be the opportunity to discuss a complaint with the person who is dealing with your case. There is, however, no automatic right to a formal meeting.

At all stages, the student has the right to a meeting with the person considering the complaint although the latter may determine that more than one meeting is necessary. Nevertheless, in the event of a student failing to attend such a meeting within a reasonable period, the person considering the complaint will be able to continue the investigation and arrive at a conclusion. It may be that students who are not studying at Sheffield Hallam University, or who live at a significant distance from the University are unable to attend a meeting in person. In that event SRAC will offer a suitable alternative such as a telephone link or, where feasible, a video link.

 At any meeting held at either stage of the procedure, the student has the right to be accompanied by one other person. The accompanying person may present the case on behalf of the student or assist in its presentation. This person cannot be a professional legal representative who has been employed to act on the student’s behalf. Where the complaint involves a member of staff, he or she will also have the right to be accompanied. Likewise, this person cannot be a professional legal representative who has been employed to act on behalf of the student or member of staff.

Where permission has been granted to a third party to pursue a complaint, SRAC and the University may, at any time, refuse to accept that representation any further if the third party pursues the complaint in a way which can be construed as being rude, aggressive, disruptive or otherwise improper. In such situations the student will be able to take over pursuit of the complaint.

All meetings held in connection with the complaint will be recorded in writing. Responsibility for ensuring that adequate records are made rests with the person considering the complaint at the relevant stage.

## Malicious, frivolous, and anonymous complaints

Students will not be disadvantaged because of raising a matter of concern or of making a complaint provided it is made in good faith. The University expects that students will not engage in frivolous complaints or make malicious complaints that are unfounded. Malicious or frivolous complaints will be rejected at the earliest stage and written reasons will be given. Complaints that are submitted anonymously will not normally be considered.

## Confidentiality and Data Protection

Raising a complaint gives SRAC permission to investigate the facts. Information you submit will remain confidential as far as this is consistent with the right of any other parties to know of any allegations that are made against them. If you make allegations against a member of staff, we will normally ask them to respond to such allegations formally and in writing.

All information submitted in relation to complaints will be dealt with confidentially and will only be disclosed to those parties involved in the investigation and judgement of the complaint, or as is necessary to progress the complaint, or as required by law.

## Disclosure

You have a right to see documents used in reaching a decision on your case. You will only be able to access documents which do not compromise the privacy and confidentiality rights of third parties. At both stages of the procedure the person considering the complaint will give you access to information and documents relevant to your complaint, including records of meetings, subject to considerations of privacy, confidentiality and the reasonable interests of any third parties.

Information you submit will only be disclosed to other members of SRAC where it is necessary to process the complaint. Individuals cited in complaints normally have a right to know the allegations made about them.

## Evidence

You may submit relevant new evidence as it becomes available. However, this may increase the length of time taken to deal with your case if it is necessary to obtain formal responses to the evidence from other parties to the complaint.

In all complaint proceedings, SRAC will only deal directly with the student, not a legal representative, unless we obtain written permission from the complainant.

## Monitoring and Review

SRAC monitors and evaluates the various mechanisms for responding to student dissatisfaction on an annual basis. Reports are available to DSA-QAG Auditors on request and the process is reviewed annually. SRAC is committed to using the outcome of the review process to develop further the quality of its provision and the mechanism by which complaints are handled.



**SRAC Complaints' Procedure**

The SRAC Complaints' Procedure is designed to be fair to everyone involved and to ensure that your complaint can be dealt with in a professional and non-confrontational manner.

***What is a complaint?***

If you have a concern about the way in which you have been treated by staff at Sheffield Regional Assessment Centre (SRAC), we would like to hear about it and discuss it with you. We hope that we can resolve any concerns you have easily but recognise that you may want to take things further, as a 'complaint'.

***What if you want to complain about a recommendation made by your assessor?***

If you have a concern about a recommendation made in the assessment it is your responsibility to discuss this fully with your assessor during your assessment. If you cannot come to an agreement you should indicate this in the Summary of Recommendations Form (SRAC6), which is completed at the end of your assessment. The Assessor will then pass on the details of your concern to the Head of SRAC to consider. The Head of SRAC will get back to you with a decision within 5 working days and may agree to amend the Assessor's recommendation. However, if the Head of SRAC does not agree to amend the report, it will be processed and sent to your funding body without amendment. If you continue to disagree it will be treated as a complaint from this point, but one which can only be dealt with by your funding body. You should explain to your funding body what has happened. They will consider how your complaint should be progressed and may take it up with SRAC. The funding body becomes involved in this type of complaint as a third party because it is responsible for deciding if the recommendations made by SRAC are fit for purpose based on the medical evidence provided by the student.

***What if you want to complain about the way in which you have been treated by someone in SRAC, or the process you have been through with SRAC?***

You should follow the procedure in the three stages outlined below:

1. Informal Stage - within SRAC.

2. Formal Stage - to the Head of Disabled Student Support at Sheffield Hallam University.

3. Ultimate point of appeal is your funding body.

**Before you proceed with a complaint please read the SRAC Complaints' Policy and Principles document carefully first.**

**1. Informal Stage - within SRAC**

When you make a complaint, it is most likely that it will be dealt with as an informal complaint. We very much hope that we will be able to resolve your concerns at this stage. However, SRAC recognises that there may be problems which cannot be resolved at this level or are too serious to be dealt with informally. In these cases, the informal stage will be by-passed, and your complaint will be dealt with at a formal stage, by the Head of Disabled Student Support from the beginning.

***Who should you contact to make a complaint?***

Usually you should speak to the member of staff in SRAC who has been most directly involved; this will be someone who you will already have spoken to.

If you are not sure who to speak to or you do not want to approach the person most directly involved, then contact either:

* the Head of Sheffield Regional Assessment Centre

or

* the SRAC Business Coordinator

or

* Senior Advisory Assessor

***When can you make a complaint?***

You should contact someone within 20 working days of the incident. The longer you leave it the more difficult it will be to sort out. However, please remember that staff members are busy people with many commitments, and they may not be able to see you immediately or deal with your complaint immediately. However, they will make every effort to resolve any situation as speedily as possible.

***What should you say and how should you prepare?***

Be clear about your concern. It is difficult to respond to concerns that are vague or general.

Think about what you want to achieve but also be prepared to listen to explanations and other points of view. SRAC will try to make improvements to its systems where it can, i.e. where a change in our processes could be permitted. However, we are obliged to work within the operating principles of DSA-QAG, as published in *Assessment Centre Quality Assurance Framework* [*www.dsa-qag.org.uk*](http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk) *,* so changes we can make may be limited.

If you think it would help you, or the person within SRAC considering the issue, to put your concerns in writing or provide evidence, please do so. But we do not want this to become a bureaucratic exercise.

Even if you do not feel calm, try and be polite and reasonable. Being upset or frustrated does not justify shouting or swearing at staff.

***What will SRAC do?***

In responding to concerns raised by students, SRAC staff will:

* respond as quickly as possible in an appropriate manner with respect for privacy and confidentiality and within a reasonable time. (Staff will endeavour to respond within 15 working days of your complaint.)
* suggest a suitable alternative person within SRAC if they cannot deal with it themselves
* be consistent in their treatment of students
* try to reach a mutually satisfactory solution
* be clear about what has been decided and make sure that any promised improvements are carried out
* not disadvantage any student who has raised an issue providing it was made in good faith
* log the complaint with the Head of SRAC.

***What you should not to do …***

Please do not go straight to the Formal Stage of the process from the beginning. This is intended for:

* significant problems where there has already been a genuine effort to resolve the issue, informally, but it has not been possible to reach a solution.
* exceptional cases, where issues are of such seriousness that they require a formal outcome, these might include but are not limited to allegations of harassment, abuse, or discrimination.

Before making use of the Formal Stage of the procedure please seek advice, for example, from Sheffield Hallam University Advice and Information Service or your Students' Union.

**2. Formal Stage - to the Head of Disabled Student Support at Sheffield Hallam University**

If you remain dissatisfied after the response you receive from SRAC about your informal complaint you can request that your complaint is considered more formally.

To make a formal complaint you will need to complete a SRAC10 form, copies available on request from SRAC, and submit it to the Head of Disabled Student Support. Address:

Sheffield Hallam, University, City Campus, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB.

The form should be submitted within a reasonable period after the subject of the complaint occurring. You will not be disadvantaged if the delay in submitting the SRAC10 form has been to seek an informal resolution of the complaint.

Make sure you have already attempted to resolve your concern informally with a relevant member of the SRAC team. Failure to attempt informal resolution may result in your formal complaint being referred for informal consideration. You are asked questions about how you have attempted to resolve your concern informally on the SRAC10 form. The only exception to this is in very serious cases, or where your complaint is about the Head of SRAC.

If you decide that it is appropriate to complete the SRAC10 form, please do the following:

* think about why the informal resolution did not work.
* think about whether you wish to have a meeting with the person considering the complaint.
* think about how to explain your complaint clearly and with relevant detail.
* think about what supporting documents might be relevant, e.g. copies of emails.
* think about what outcome you want from this complaint, e.g. an apology, change of a process.

Within 5 working days of receiving your SRAC10 form, the Head of Disabled Student Support will send you a letter of acknowledgement confirming receipt. The letter will indicate whether the complaint is appropriate for this person to deal with; if it is thought to be frivolous or malicious it will be dismissed. The letter will also indicate who will be considering the complaint.

The person conducting the complaint will do so as quickly as possible recognising the need for a thorough investigation and a speedy outcome and considering when suitable redress would have to be completed to be effective. You will be informed of progress in general and of any delays.

Once a conclusion is reached, the Head of Disabled Student Support, will write to you. If your complaint is upheld, the letter will include an indication of appropriate redress. If the complaint is rejected, the letter will include the reason for the decision.

**3. Ultimate point of appeal**

If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved by the Formal Stage of the process, the ultimate point of appeal is to your funding body. It is advised that you do this as soon as possible after receiving the written outcome of the Formal Stage of the process within Sheffield Hallam University.

***What will your funding body do?***

Your funding body will review the complaint and the way that it has been dealt with by SRAC and Sheffield Hallam University. It is unlikely to be a reconsideration starting afresh, but not is it limited to an appeal against previous decisions on restricted grounds. The nature and extent of the review will be at the sole discretion of the person considering the case. It may include one or more of:

* a review of the consideration of the complaint at the Informal and Formal Stages to see if it was conducted fairly and in accordance with SRAC's Complaints' Procedure.
* a review of the information available at the Formal Stage to see if more information is required.
* further investigation.
* consideration of further evidence and arguments, but not new complaints, submitted by the student.
* other action considered by the person conducting the case to be appropriate.