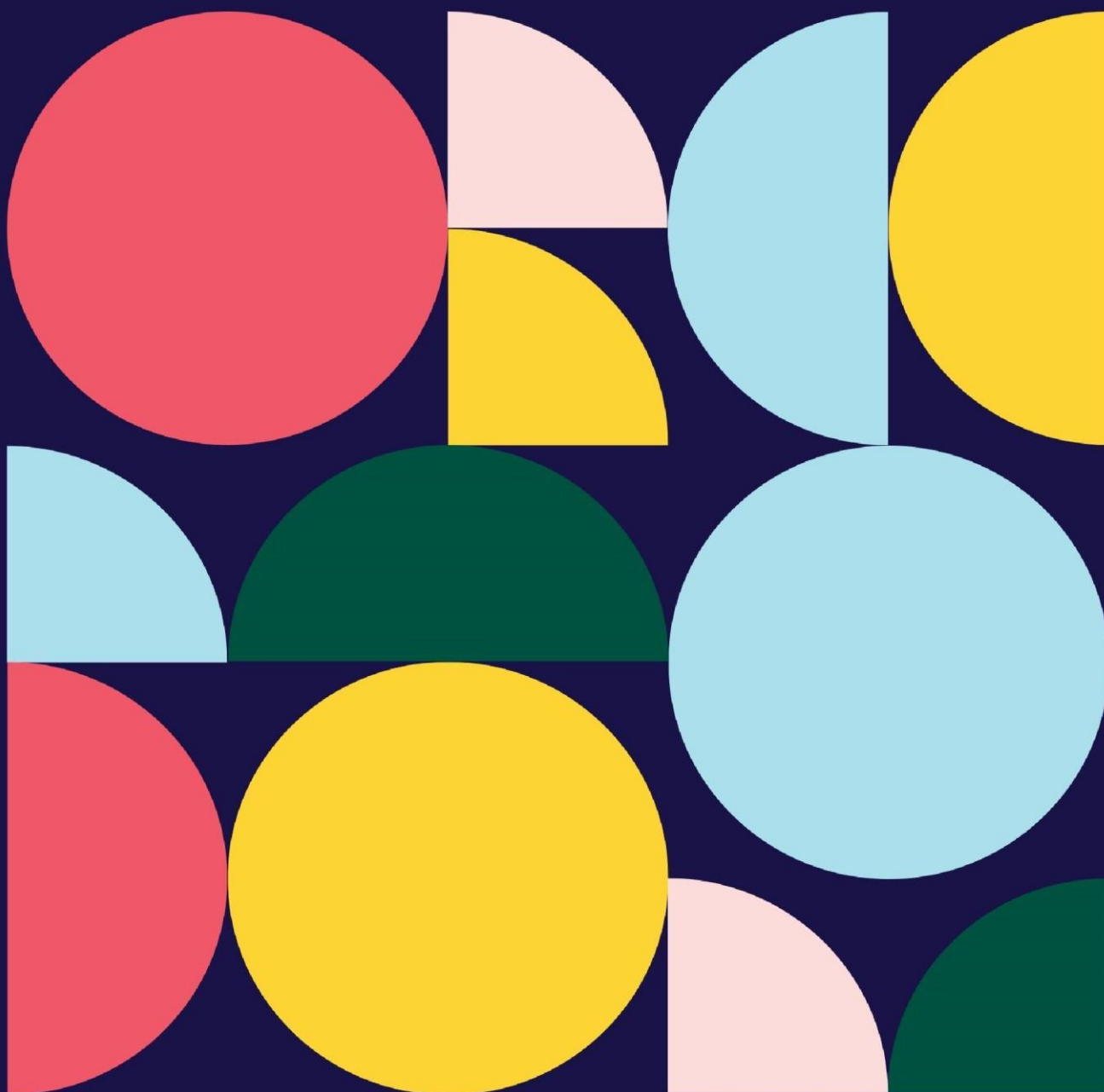




Bristol SU Complaints Policy

Owner: Governance and L&D Manager

Approval: Trustees



Date created: Feb 2016

Date reviewed and approved: Sep 2026

Date next review: Dec 2027

1. What is a Complaint?

- 1.1 For the purpose of this policy, a complaint is defined as **“an expression of dissatisfaction or concern”** related to someone’s behaviour or conduct within the SU, or about the standard of service provided by the SU.
- 1.2 Complaints about students can only be formally investigated if the alleged misconduct falls within the scope of this policy and if the student the complaint is about is a registered student at the University of Bristol.
- 1.3 Students who have opted out of membership are still required to adhere to our Code of Conducts and follow this Complaints Policy.

2. Principles of the Complaints Policy

- 2.1. Bristol SU aims to provide a positive experience for students, staff and visitors and are committed to the provision of high-quality services and activities. We use complaints to help us improve our services.
- 2.2. We value equity, diversity and inclusivity and expect individuals to act with honesty and integrity and to be treated with respect and consideration.
- 2.3. We strive to adopt a human-centered, trauma informed approach in the way that we manage, investigate and resolve complaints and allegations about conduct and behaviour. We aim to:
 - Demonstrate empathy, compassion and understanding throughout and be as transparent, accessible and open as we can whilst maintaining confidentiality;
 - Proactively make wellbeing referrals where appropriate or signpost to the university wellbeing service or the SU Academic Advice service when needed.
 - Communicate in a timely manner and arrange in-person meetings, teams or phone calls where necessary;
 - Consider the cultural context and background – for example using an appropriate and culturally competent Investigating Officer when needed and ensuring as diverse a panel as possible;
 - Ensure that there is a named person to contact for support if needed.

3. Before Submitting a Formal Complaint – Informal Resolution

- 3.1 Wherever possible every effort should be made to resolve the matter before a formal complaint is made. Where possible, we try to resolve concerns and complaints informally. This may not always be possible depending on the context or severity of the alleged breach.
- 3.2 If you feel comfortable to, you should attempt to resolve your concerns by talking to the most relevant person. This could be:
 - The person you’re unhappy with (if your complaint is about someone’s conduct or behaviour).
 - The manager of the SU staff member or SU service (if your complaint is about the SU or SU staff)
 - The leadership of the student group, activity or event, or a member, or a staff member within the SU development team (if related to this)
 - A member of the Safeguarding Team (which are the [Heads of](#)) if it is a safeguarding concern
- 3.3 As much as possible, we will work with you to resolve issues before a formal complaint is submitted which may lead to an investigation. If you need help please contact the relevant [Bristol SU staff member](#).
- 3.4 An informal resolution could include mediation, an apology, training, a refund, a warning or discussing the matter with the student to help support them to improve their conduct.
- 3.5 An informal resolution won’t be used if:
 - The student has not improved following previous discussions or a warning;

- It is more appropriate to deal with it through a formal complaint due to the potential seriousness of the issue or safeguarding concern.

3.6 If after informal resolution you are still not satisfied, or you do not feel safe talking to the person in the first place, you can submit a formal complaint and if needed an investigation will take place.

4 Scope - Formal Complaints we will investigate

4.1 You can make a complaint about any of the following:

- **The Students' Union (SU)** e.g. service, event, activity, decision
- **Conduct or behaviour of a SU student group**
- **Conduct or behaviour of an individual or individuals** e.g. an SU student group leader or committee member, SU volunteer, representative, staff member, trustee or Full-Time Officer or any student if in relation to an SU group, activity or event or if there are any safeguarding concerns.

4.2 To help the SU investigate and respond effectively, your complaint should ideally be raised as soon as possible after the incident, issue or situation using the complaints form on our website. We usually cannot accept complaints brought more than 90 days after the event.

4.3 We appreciate there may be reasons why you can't always do this and you should explain the reason for this on the form. If we feel that an unreasonable delay in raising your complaint hinders our ability to investigate or manage your case, we will explain this to you and we may not be able to proceed

4.4 Examples are given in **Annex 1** of this policy regarding the types of cases that Bristol SU will or won't manage or investigate and which may be passed to the university to investigate and manage.

4.5 The Complaints Team will assess all complaints received. In consultation with others they may resolve the complaint using one of the informal resolutions in 3.4

4.6 Any concerns about suspected fraud or dishonesty will be investigated.

4.7 We reserve the right to initiate an investigation without a formal complaint or reporting party, however, no action will be taken against a student about any matter that has been reported anonymously unless it is possible to verify the matter reported.

4.8 If the SU are made aware of any immediate risk to a student or students we may need to act on it and initiate the complaints policy and complete a safeguarding risk assessment.

4.9 If we feel there is interpersonal conflict or disagreement between students rather than misconduct or unacceptable behaviour, we may not be able to investigate, but we can give some Words of Advice to the responding student(s) to help them understand the impact of their actions, particularly in cases involving unintended effects, or situations complicated by wellbeing concerns.

4.10 We may also not be able to investigate a complaint where the time spent would be disproportionate to the seriousness, impact, or complexity of the issues raised or if the individual that is the subject of the complaint has left the Union

4.11 SU staff or Full-Time Officers should refer to the Staff Grievance Policy to raise any concerns or complaints.

4.12 Complaints about the Students' Union

Register Your Complaint

4.12.1 If you have a complaint about an SU service, event, activity, or decision and you cannot resolve it, you should register your complaint using the form on our website

4.12.2 You will be asked to outline the nature of your concern, provide details and be asked to clarify your desired outcome (we may not always be able to achieve the outcome you are seeking)

- 4.12.3 You will receive acknowledgement of your complaint from the SU Complaints Team, who will confirm details of next steps.
- 4.12.4 Depending on the nature and context of your complaint, it will be designated to an appropriate manager within the SU who will investigate the complaint and the Complaints Team will let you know who this is.

Investigation

- 4.12.5 The appropriate manager will determine the facts, may speak to witnesses, consider any evidence and mitigating circumstances and determine the appropriate outcome. Depending upon the seriousness of the complaint, it may be necessary for us to contact you to request additional information or evidence.
- 4.12.6 The appropriate manager will usually contact you within 21 days of your complaint to provide a response. If any extension is required to this timeline, the manager will update you.

Appeal

- 4.12.7 If you are dissatisfied with the response, you may appeal the outcome by writing to the SU Complaints Team at bristolsu-complaints@bristol.ac.uk. Your appeal should be submitted within 7 days of receiving the original outcome from your complaint.
- 4.12.8 Please outline the reasons you wish to appeal. You **may only** appeal if you feel:
- That the process was not correctly followed when making the decision;
 - That new evidence has come to light that was not available to the appropriate manager which may have materially affected the decision.
- 4.12.9 Your appeal will be allocated to a member of the Senior Leadership Team (who has not previously been involved in your complaint). They will review your original complaint, the investigation and Manager's response and will reply to you with an outcome to your appeal within 14 days from the date you submitted your appeal.

4.13 Complaints about a Student Group

Register your complaint

- 4.13.1 If you have a complaint about a student group (e.g the committee's conduct or behaviour or the way the society is being run) and you cannot resolve it informally, you should register your complaint using the form on our website.
- 4.13.2 You will be asked to outline the nature of your concern, provide details and be asked to clarify your desired outcome (we may not always be able to achieve the outcome you are seeking).
- 4.13.3 We have a Student Groups Conduct and Disciplinary Policy that student groups should abide by. Where you can, you should highlight if/where you think this Code has been breached.
- 4.13.4 The Complaints Team will assess the complaint, especially to check if it can be resolved informally, it is in scope of the policy and if there are any safeguarding risks.
- 4.13.5 You will receive acknowledgement of your complaint from the SU Complaints Team, who will confirm details of next steps.
- 4.13.6 Depending on the nature and context of your complaint, it will be designated to an appropriate manager or staff member within the Bristol SU Student Development Team who will investigate the complaint (called the Investigating Officer) and the Complaints Team will let you know who this is.

Investigation

- 4.13.7 The Investigating Officer will contact you. They may speak to witnesses, gather and consider any available evidence, consider the facts and any mitigating circumstances.
- 4.13.8 The Investigating Officer will need to provide details of the allegations to the student group and will give them the opportunity to respond to the allegations.
- 4.13.9 The Investigating Officer will treat your complaint with discretion and only share details on a need-to-know basis. Some details of the complaint will need to be shared with others within the SU or university to effectively investigate.
- 4.13.10 When the Investigating Officer is satisfied that sufficient evidence has been obtained, they will produce an investigation report containing the available evidence which will summarise the facts, state whether there was a breach of the Bristol SU Student Group Conduct and Disciplinary Policy and they may make recommendations of next steps
- 4.13.11 The Investigating Officer will share their report with the complaints team for consideration and once this happens the Bristol SU Student Groups Conduct and Disciplinary Policy may be enacted.
- 4.13.12 You will normally expect to receive a decision about your complaint within 30 days. You will be informed if the timeline needs to be extended by either the Investigating Officer or the Complaints Team.
- 4.13.13 You will be informed if your complaint was upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. You won't receive the full report but will receive a summary.
- 4.13.14 If the disciplinary process needs to be enacted you will be informed that it is going to a disciplinary hearing and after the disciplinary you will be given broad information but will not be given specific details of the action taken, unless it is deemed necessary.
- 4.13.15 The Bristol SU Student Groups Conduct and Disciplinary Policy outlines the disciplinary process.

Appeal

- 4.13.16 If you are dissatisfied with the response, you may appeal the outcome by writing to the SU Complaints Team at bristolsu-complaints@bristol.ac.uk. Your appeal should be submitted within 7 days of receiving the outcome.
- 4.13.17 Please outline the reasons you wish to appeal. You **may only** appeal if you feel that
- That the process was not correctly followed when making the decision;
 - That new evidence has come to light that was not available to the Investigating Officer which may have materially affected the decision.
- 4.13.18 You cannot appeal if the only basis is that you disagree with the decision
- 4.13.19 The Complaints Team will review the appeal to ensure it is in scope
- 4.13.20 Your appeal will then be allocated to a member of the Management Team (who has not previously been involved in your complaint). They will review your original complaint, the report and Investigating Officer's response and will reply to you with an outcome to your appeal within 14 days from the date you submitted your appeal.

4.14 Complaint about an Individual or Individuals

Register your complaint

- 4.14.1 If you have a complaint about the conduct or behaviour of an individual, or individuals, that you cannot resolve informally, you should register your complaint using the form on our website.
- 4.14.2 You will be asked to outline the nature of your concern, provide details and be asked to clarify your desired outcome (we may not always be able to achieve the outcome you are seeking).
- 4.14.3 We have a Bristol SU Student Conduct and Disciplinary Policy which all students are expected to abide by. Where you can, you should highlight if/where you think this Code has been breached.

- 4.14.4 The Complaints Team will assess the complaint, especially to check if it can be resolved informally, it is in scope of the policy and if there are any safeguarding risks
- 4.14.5 You will receive acknowledgement of your complaint from the SU Complaints Team, who will confirm details of next steps.
- 4.14.6 Depending on the nature and context of your complaint, it will be designated an Investigating Officer and the Complaints Team will let you know who this is. This person may be external to the SU.
- 4.14.7 If your complaint is about a staff member, Full Time Officer or Trustee, your allegations will be investigated and managed using our separate staff policies and protocols. We will ask for all relevant information and evidence from you. Once the investigation starts, it is likely that you will not be contacted again on this aspect, unless we require further specific information. You will not receive details of the action taken.
- 4.14.8 If your allegations are serious in nature and relate to a current registered student at the University, this may need to be investigated by the University and sexual misconduct, sexual violence or sexual harassment will always be investigated by the university.
- 4.14.9 In these cases, we would refer the complaint to the Student Resolution Service (SRS) in the University and request that they investigate. We will inform you of this and pass on any relevant information that you may need to know.

Investigation

- 4.14.10 The Investigating Officer will contact you. They may speak to witnesses, gather and consider any available evidence, consider the facts and any mitigating circumstances.
- 4.14.11 The Investigating Officer will need to provide details of the allegations to the responding party and will give them the opportunity to respond to the allegations.
- 4.14.12 The Investigating Officer will treat your complaint with discretion and only share details on a need-to-know basis. Some details of the complaint will need to be shared with others within the SU or university to effectively investigate.
- 4.14.13 When the Investigating Officer is satisfied that sufficient evidence has been obtained, they will produce an investigation report containing the available evidence which will summarise the facts, state whether there was a breach of the Bristol SU Student Conduct and Disciplinary Policy and they may make recommendations of next steps
- 4.14.14 The Investigating Officer will share their report with the complaints team for consideration and once this happens the Bristol SU Student Conduct and Disciplinary Policy may be enacted.
- 4.14.15 You will normally expect to receive a decision about your complaint within 30 working days. You will be informed if the timeline needs to be extended by either the Investigating Officer or the Complaints Team.
- 4.14.16 You will be informed if your complaint was upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. You won't receive the full report but will receive a summary.
- 4.14.17 If the disciplinary process needs to be enacted you will be informed that it is going to a disciplinary hearing and after the disciplinary hearing you will be given broad information but will not be given specific details of the action taken, unless it is deemed necessary.
- 4.14.18 The Bristol SU Student Conduct and Disciplinary Policy outlines the disciplinary process.

Appeal

- 4.14.19 If you are dissatisfied with the response, you may appeal the outcome by writing to the SU Complaints Team at bristolsu-complaints@bristol.ac.uk. Your appeal should be submitted within 7 days of receiving the outcome.
- 4.14.20 Please outline the reasons you wish to appeal. You **may only** appeal if you feel that

- That the process was not correctly followed when making the decision;
- That new evidence has come to light that was not available to the Investigating Officer which may have materially affected the decision.

4.14.21 You cannot appeal if the only basis of the appeal is that you disagree with the decision.

4.14.22 The Complaints Team will review the appeal to ensure it is in scope.

4.14.23 Your appeal will then be allocated to a member of the Management Team (who has not previously been involved in your complaint). They will review your original complaint, the report and Investigating Officer's response and will reply to you with an outcome to your appeal within 14 days from the date you submitted your appeal.

5. Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Precautionary Measure

5.1 Upon receiving a misconduct or unacceptable behaviour allegation, the SU will make an immediate assessment of risk and where appropriate will undertake a safeguarding risk assessment which may consider whether precautionary measures may be required pending investigation.

5.2 The SU will carry out a risk assessment in cases where:

- The SU is managing the complaint and investigation; or
- The University is managing the complaint and investigation but where an additional risk assessment is required because of the context or because the responding party holds a leadership or representative position in the SU or are a member of an SU group or activity.

5.3 When we are communicating with all parties, we will ensure clarity where we may need to enforce or enact a precautionary measure as determined by the University and where we are conducting and implementing our own safeguarding risk assessment and precautionary measures.

5.4 A precautionary measure isn't a permanent decision but a temporary measure for safety. It is to be used only where, following the safeguarding risk assessment process, it is considered necessary to prevent harm, protect a member or members of the University community, or the property of the SU / University.

5.5 We adopt an approach to precautionary measures which is victim-centred, aligned with our values and seeks to promote a culture where victims feel safe and supported to raise complaints and allegations. This is balanced with a need to offer wellbeing support to, and respect the rights of, reporting parties.

5.6 Where misconduct allegations are of a serious nature, such as serious sexual misconduct, it will usually be the case that the responding party is temporarily restricted from all Students' Union activities and events pending investigation, unless there is a clear case and evidence that the responding party would not present a risk to others.

5.7 All risk assessments that result in the application of a precautionary measure will be signed off by the SU's Supervising Trustee

5.8 The SU will inform both the reporting and responding party that there is a precautionary measure and also any relevant leaders of groups or activities.

5.9 If at any point a disclosure is made to an SU member of staff but the reporting party does not wish to file a formal complaint, the staff member will give careful consideration as to whether to escalate the allegation (in consultation with the Student Union's Safeguarding lead). It is our preference to support the wishes and preferences of anyone who has been affected. However, in certain circumstances we have a duty of care that may mean we should investigate an allegation even if that is not their preference – for example in situations where the disclosure may mean there is a serious risk to others.

5.10 More information about the precautionary measures are set out in the Bristol SU Student Conduct and Disciplinary Policy and Bristol SU Student Groups Conduct and Disciplinary Policy.

6. Scope - Complaints we will not Investigate

University

- 6.1 Bristol SU is independent of the University of Bristol (UoB) and the SU cannot investigate a complaint about the University, university services, university staff or if your complaint is related to the misconduct of another student which is not in relation to the SU.
- 6.2 Where a matter is being investigated by the University, the SU will not investigate, but may need to do a safeguarding risk assessment and apply a precautionary measure while there is an investigation taking place by the university.
- 6.3 If you are a student, and have a complaint about another student, university staff member or the university you can [report here to the University](#):

Unacceptable Behaviour:

6.3.1 Reporting of students: If you have experienced or witnessed unacceptable behaviour from a UoB student, then you can submit a [Request contact from an Adviser form](#) to be put in contact with an Adviser from the Student Resolution Service. More information is available on the website, including what to expect when you [talk to the Student Resolution Service](#).

6.3.2 Reporting of staff: If the behaviour involves a UoB staff member, you can report it using the [staff unacceptable behaviour form](#). You can contact the student complaints team at student-complaints@bristol.ac.uk for help and advice before submitting your form.

6.3.3 Anonymous Reporting of Unacceptable Behaviour: You can [anonymously report](#) incidents of unacceptable behaviour by a UoB student. The University will not be able to contact you or act on this information, but it will be used to better understand the issues impacting the university community, and to shape their prevention and response to unacceptable behaviour.

6.3.4 Sexual Misconduct or Other Potentially Criminal Behaviour: If you have a concern relating to any form of sexual misconduct or other potentially criminal behaviour by a UoB student please contact the Student Resolution Service by submitting a [Request contact from an Adviser form](#) or emailing srs-casework@bristol.ac.uk. There is more information on the [sexual misconduct webpages](#).

- 6.4 **University service or action:** If you have a complaint about action or lack of action by the University, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the University (for example halls, your course) you can submit a complaint using the [Student Complaints Procedure](#).
- 6.5 Based on the findings and outcome of a university investigation, the SU may need to enact the disciplinary process as outlined in the Bristol SU Student Conduct and Disciplinary Policy, if the student is involved in the SU in anyway.
- 6.6 Bristol SU can help support you:
 - Our [Academic Advice](#) Advisors can help you think about the most appropriate way to raise your issue with the university and if needed, support you to do so.
 - Your [Full Time Officers](#) or Student Community Organisers can raise general issues to the University or external bodies.
 - Your faculty or course representatives can advocate for changes to university policy or practice that would result in better outcomes for students. This tends to be most effective when the issue affects a larger number of students e.g. a whole course

Police

- 6.7 This section applies where the alleged misconduct may also constitute an offence under criminal law.

- 6.8 Where a matter is being investigated by the police, the SU will usually not investigate, but may need to do a safeguarding risk assessment and apply a precautionary measure until the outcome of the police investigation.
- 6.9 If at any point throughout the SU investigation, we feel that a criminal offence has taken place the SU may need to report it to the police (and university) and any SU investigation will be adjourned until the outcome of the police investigation.
- 6.10 Based on the findings and outcome of the police investigation, the SU may then need to enact the disciplinary process as outlined in the Bristol SU Student Conduct and Disciplinary Policy.
- 6.11 If the police decide not to proceed with a case or that criminal proceedings have returned a 'not guilty' verdict it does not preclude the SU from taking further action as there is a higher standard of proof in criminal proceedings.

7 Wellbeing Support

- 7.1 We are committed to supporting the wellbeing of our students including reporting parties, responding parties, witnesses and other people involved in complaints and allegations of misconduct or unacceptable behaviour.
- 7.2 If you would like to explore your options regarding wellbeing support please raise this with the Investigating Officer, relevant Manager or staff member or Complaints Team involved in your complaint. They will discuss this with you and share potential options.
- 7.3 If we have concerns about your wellbeing or mental health, for example because of the nature of a complaint, we may make an automatic referral to the [University Wellbeing Service](#). They may contact you to offer support.

8 Will your Complaint be Kept Confidential?

- 8.1 In order to deal with formal complaints fully and fairly, it will usually be necessary to identify the reporting party to those involved in the investigation and outcome decision. The responding party will usually be entitled to know who has complained about them, especially if the complaint progresses to a disciplinary hearing.
- 8.2 At all times during investigations, confidentiality and discretion must be maintained by all those involved, regardless of the nature of the incident.

9 How is my Complaints Data Managed?

- 9.1 The records (including emails, evidence, personal data) will be kept in line with our [Privacy Policy](#).
- 9.2 After this time, we will remove all personal details and just keep a basic record of the complaint and outcome for the purposes of future complaints or improving Bristol SU's services and activities.
- 9.3 Complaint information will be stored safely and securely on a database, Sharepoint Site and held in the complaints email mailbox with access only available to relevant staff
- 9.4 Sharing of documents with other SU staff, university Student Resolution Service (SRS) or external Investigating Officers will be password protected.

**Complaints are normally received by the Governance and L&D Manager or Governance and Complaints Assistant, so if your complaint is about the Governance and L&D Manager or Governance and Complaints Assistant please contact the [Chief Executive](#) who will take over the complaint process.*

Annex 1: Examples of cases that would/might/would not fall within scope

The university has primary responsibility for managing and investigating conduct cases that affect students as students. For example, this includes allegations that potentially impact on a students' fitness to remain a member of the university community.

Examples of cases that **would** be investigated and managed by Bristol SU:

- Allegations of misconduct or unacceptable behaviour that relates specifically to a Bristol SU student group leader or committee member, student group member, volunteer or representative, for example, allegations that may specifically impact on someone's suitability to carry out a Bristol SU role or be part of a student group.
- Allegations regarding an incident that is centred around a Bristol SU facility, activity, service, event or space that breaches this policy but is not deemed by the university to breach its [Student Disciplinary Regulations and Procedure](#) – possible examples could include:
 - A student or student leader brings Bristol SU into disrepute;
 - Theft of Bristol SU property;
 - Failure to comply with precautionary measures issued by the Bristol SU

Examples of cases that **may** be investigated and managed by Bristol SU:

- Disclosures regarding misconduct or unacceptable behaviour by a student where the reporting party does not wish to use the university procedures. This may, for example, apply if the only sanction that the reporting party is seeking is limited to removal of the reporting party from a specific Bristol SU activity / event. Bristol SU would normally encourage students to raise complaints with the university (where conduct may have breached university standards) but may consider these situations on a case-by-case basis.
- Examples of cases that **would not** be investigated and managed by Bristol SU but will be investigated and managed by the university:
- Allegations of serious misconduct that breach the university's [Student Disciplinary Regulations and Procedure](#).
- Complaints about the university or university staff.
- Allegations of sexual misconduct or violence where the responding party is a student.
- Bristol SU may still undertake an additional safeguarding risk assessment where appropriate, because of the context (especially if they are a member of a student group) or because the responding party holds a leadership/representative position in Bristol SU.