

Inappropriate comments in course and teaching evaluations

INFORMATION FOR ACADEMIC STAFF

What advice is given to students?

Students are provided with advice on how to give constructive feedback. [Guidance to students](#) notes that abusive or threatening comments are unacceptable under University policy.

Students are advised that feedback provided through evaluations is *confidential*, i.e. the identity of students is able to be determined, but is protected in normal reporting processes.

SET evaluations are completed by students as a part of their study and comments made in course and teaching evaluations fall under the same disciplinary rules as other activities undertaken by students in their time at the University.

What University rules apply to inappropriate comments in SET evaluations?

- The University's Statute for Student Discipline requires students to act reasonably towards one another and towards all members of the University:
- The University's policy on the [Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy and Procedures](#) defines bullying behaviour and different kinds of harassment and discrimination.

Inappropriate language or offensive personal comments in SET evaluations may constitute acting unreasonably towards a staff member in breach of the Statute for Student Discipline, even if the comments are not bullying, harassment or discrimination.

If a staff member considers that a comment in a student evaluation is inappropriate, offensive, abusive or threatening, he or she may take a complaint to the Academic Head.

An Academic Head has a responsibility to treat all complaints seriously and take prompt steps to resolve any complaints. The Academic Head may also refer the staff member to support services.

What happens next?

The Academic Head will review the complaint, taking advice from the Associate Dean (Academic) or (Learning and Teaching) as necessary, and make a decision as to whether further action or investigation is warranted.

If the Academic Head determines that further action or investigation is warranted the matter should be referred to the University Proctor.

The process to be followed must align with the [Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy and Procedures](#) and [Guidelines](#) (where the comment may constitute a breach of that policy), and the [Statute for Student Discipline](#).

The Proctor may decide that the complaint is not substantiated and that further action is not warranted.

1. Informal resolution

If the Proctor determines that further action is warranted he or she may recommend that there be:

(a) an informal meeting between the student and the complainant, with the Proctor mediating

The agreement of the complainant and the student is required before any meeting may be arranged as the identity of both the student and the complainant will be disclosed. The Academic Quality Office will provide the identity of the student in strict confidence to the Proctor, on the approval of the DVC(A).

N.B: If the student or staff member does not agree to option (a), the Proctor may choose to proceed with a meeting as in (b).

OR

(b) a meeting between the Proctor and the student

The Academic Quality Office will provide the identity of the student in strict confidence to the Proctor, on the approval of the DVC(A).

The student may bring a support person, and a record must be kept of the meeting. In this instance the identity of the student must not be revealed to the complainant, although the identity of the complainant will be made known to the student.

N.B: This meeting may result in resolution of the matter at this level, with the Proctor opting to issue an oral or written reprimand. The Academic Head may inform the complainant of the outcome of their complaint. The AQO will remove the comment from the evaluation report on the approval of the Academic Head.

2. Formal resolution

If the Proctor determines, after meeting with the student and reviewing the evidence, that the comment constitutes a breach of student discipline, the issue may be referred to the Registrar with a recommendation that the complaint is heard by Discipline Committee.

If the complaint is upheld, Discipline Committee has a range of penalties available to it under the Student Discipline Statute including: an oral or written reprimand; a fine not exceeding \$5,000; a limitation or prohibition on attendance at any class or classes or the use and enjoyment of any of the facilities; a suspension from attendance at the University or any class or classes for such period as it thinks fit; or cancellation of a student's enrolment at the University in a course of study or training.

N:B: the outcome of the Discipline Committee hearing will be reported back to the Academic Head and the Head may inform the complainant of the outcome of their complaint. The AQO will remove the comment from the evaluation report on the approval of the Academic Head.

Relevant policies and guidance

[Statute for Student Discipline](#)

[Enhancement and Evaluation of Courses and Teaching Policy and Procedures](#)

[Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy](#)

[Staff and student complaints flowchart](#)