

# **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE POST OF STUDENT ADVISOR AND OMBUDSMAN – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK**

## **1. Student Complaints/Grievances**

**ALL** Students are members of the University. As such, they are entitled to be treated with respect by the academic, administrative and services staff of the University. Moreover, they are entitled to expect that the systems in place in the University are appropriate for their purposes and not unfair or unnecessarily onerous for them.

Where difficulties arise for a student, it is desirable that complaints or grievances are dealt with as quickly as possible. Therefore, students who have a complaint or grievance should normally begin to deal with it within one month of the events that gave rise to the complaint happening or being experienced.

It is desirable that such complaints or grievances be dealt with in an informal manner as quickly and at as low a level as possible. Therefore, if a student has a complaint or grievance regarding the actions or inactions of an individual staff member they should approach that person, explain their concerns and seek an early resolution by discussion. If no resolution results from this discussion, or in discussion with the relevant Head of Department/School/Administrative Office/Student Service, or if the student feels unable to approach the staff member or the relevant Head directly, the services of the Student Advisor and Ombudsman may be engaged.

## **2. Student Advisor and Ombudsman**

The post of Student Advisor and Ombudsman is a part-time one, tenable for a period of three years and renewable once only. The holder will be an experienced member [or retired member] of the academic staff who is familiar with the workings of the University and will report directly to the President.

The purpose of the post of Student Advisor and Ombudsman is to advise and assist students with the resolution of difficulties, complaints or grievances involving staff or services of the University in an informal manner and as quickly as possible.

The services provided for by this post are complementary to a range of existing student services and the Student Advisor and Ombudsman may refer relevant student issues for resolution by those services as appropriate.

## **3. Role and Duties of the Student Advisor and Ombudsman**

The Student Advisor and Ombudsman

- i. advises and assists students in matters arising from their membership of the University;
- ii. hears and considers complaints and grievances of individual students or groups of students;
- iii. facilitates communication by bringing parties together to resolve grievances;
- iv. refers complaints or grievances to the appropriate body for resolution, if appropriate;
- v. examines complaints or grievances to ascertain the facts of the case;

- vi. recommends to a Head of College, School, Department, or Head of Administrative/Service Unit, the action that may be required for the resolution of legitimate complaints or grievances;
- vii. submits an annual report to the Governing Body (a report that shall normally be released to the University at large);
- viii. highlights, in the annual report to Governing Body, recurring difficulties or patterns of difficulty encountered by students and makes recommendations to Governing Body for the resolution of such difficulties. Governing Body may refer the report to Academic Council for comment. Where appropriate, recurring issues will be notified by the Student Advisor and Ombudsman to the Registrar and Senior Vice-President Academic, the Vice-President for the Student Experience and the Vice-President for Teaching and Learning for follow up action;
- ix. carries out such other duties appropriate to the post as may be assigned by the President or Governing Body from time to time.

#### **4. Powers of the Student Advisor and Ombudsman**

- i. The power of the Student Advisor and Ombudsman lies in the prestige of the office, the independence of the individual from any institutional influence, and the fairness, objectivity and impartiality of the attempts to resolve conflicts.
- ii. The Student Advisor and Ombudsman shall have access to all relevant persons and documentation within the University, and the freedom to investigate complaints.
- iii. The Student Advisor and Ombudsman does not have authority to take disciplinary action, reverse decisions or over-ride regulations.
- iv. The Student Advisor and Ombudsman serves as a mediator to resolve disputes informally rather than as an arbitrator.

#### **5. Confidentiality**

- i. All enquiries to the Student Advisor and Ombudsman will remain confidential and the Student Advisor and Ombudsman will not report the names of those who use the service to anyone without their permission, except in cases of serious threat to life or property.
- ii. The Student Advisor and Ombudsman will protect the identity of individuals and their concerns and will not disclose having met or talked with a party or parties, without permission of the party or parties, except in cases of serious threat to life or property.
- iii. The Student Advisor and Ombudsman will take specific action related to an individual's concerns only with the individual's express permission and only to the extent permitted, subject to Nos. i and ii above.
- iv. Communication with the Student Advisor and Ombudsman is not notice to the University. The Student Ombudsman's Office is not an office of record. Speaking with the Ombudsman is not "notice to the University" of problems or policy violations. If a student wishes the University to "be on notice," that is, formally to know about a particular problem and formally respond, the Ombudsman can assist in identifying the office to contact.