Guidance on student discipline, professional suitability and social networking

December 2012
If the University has concerns with the conduct or behaviour of students then it is able to investigate and take appropriate action for persistent or serious misconduct. In the case of professional programmes, there are often codes of conduct specific to the profession in addition to the Universities’ regulations.

**Behaviour in the Community**

Disciplinary action may be taken against a student if there is a complaint from any person within or outside the University. If your actions as a resident in Newcastle negatively affect any other residents or visitors this is classed as behaviour outside of the University which brings the University into disrepute. The University will investigate any reports of poor behaviour believed to involve students. In many cases, students may be given advice on how to best behave within the community. However, please remember that the University has the right to take action for more serious cases of misconduct under the disciplinary procedures. Penalties range from fines to expulsion from the University for gross misconduct.

**Residences**

As a student in Halls you must abide by the House Rules. The full set of house rules can be found at http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/uso/stud_reg_handbk/

Failure to abide by the House Rules may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the University Regulations.

This procedure is in four stages:

**Stage 1**
A member of staff attends the incident.

**Stage 2**
The house manager will conduct an interview if they have received a report of an incident.

**Stage 3**
An informal hearing will be held with the group manager for the group of residences.

Standard fines may be applied at Stages 2 and 3. For a full list please see Appendix 4 Handbook of Student Regulations.

**Stage 4**

Depending on the seriousness of the report, the incident may be referred (at any stage) to the Head of Student Accommodation, as Disciplinary Officer, for a Stage 4 (formal) hearing. **You may be accompanied by a friend or representative at any stage of the process.**

A group manager may interview residents personally following an investigation. If the matter is serious or persistent, it may be referred to the Head of Accommodation for a Stage 4 (formal) disciplinary hearing.

You should be notified in writing of the date and time of a hearing not less than 5 days before the hearing takes place. Occasionally the Head of Student Accommodation may determine a case without a panel. You may take witnesses and submit evidence in support of your case.

**If you are asked to attend this type of hearing, please get in touch so that we may help you prepare your case.**

Please be aware that failure to attend a Disciplinary Hearing may lead to additional action.

Your Guidance Tutor and Programme Leader may also be notified of an investigation and outcome of a hearing.
Appeals

You have the right of appeal against a standard fine. If a penalty is imposed, you may appeal in writing to the Student Appeals and Complaints Ombudsman within 10 working days of being notified of the decision. An appeal re-pens the case, with the full range of penalties available (i.e. the result of an appeal could be a more unfavourable outcome).

A Stage 4 hearings usually takes place to hear students’ appeals against standard fines.

Damage Charges

These are straight re-charges that the University has incurred as a result of either accidental damage or malicious damage. In the case of accidental damage, you will be given an invoice for the cost. In the case of malicious damage, there will also be disciplinary proceedings. If you are unhappy with or wish to question accidental damage charges, you should use the appeals procedure. All appeals must be lodged within 10 working days of notification of the damage charges.

Professional Programmes

If the University has concerns with conduct or behaviour of students then it is able to investigate. In the case of professional programmes, there are often codes of conduct specific to the profession in addition to the Universities' regulations. You should never personally post or allow others to post any offensive comments or images on Social Networking sites which could raise any concerns for your suitability to practice. The University and professional bodies publish standards, codes and guidance on the use of social networking sites. You should ensure that you are familiar with your code to avoid any potential breaches of your professional code of conduct.

Professional Suitability: Stage 1 – Informal

The purpose of a Stage 1 meeting is to discuss issues of concern which may be dealt with locally, for example issues that can be dealt with by the Programme Leader without the need for further action. Only if the issue is so serious or cannot be dealt with by advice, guidance or oral warning would this progress to Stage 2 (formal) under Section 3.8.2 of the student handbook of regulations.

Professional Suitability: Stage 2 - Formal

The matter will be referred to the Executive Dean as Disciplinary Officer who will have the case investigated. The Disciplinary Officer will consider a resulting report to determine whether a panel is to be convened. Please see Section 3.8.2 of Handbook of Student Regulations. The Disciplinary Officer will decide whether or not a Professional Suitability Board should be convened. If no breach of a professional code is involved then the hearing will take place with the Disciplinary Officer and the Faculty Registrar.

You should be given no less than five working days notice of a Professional Suitability Board, be advised that you may take a friend or representative and be given copies of relevant documentation unless there are reasons why information should not be shared.

At the Board, the person bringing the case will present their case to the panel; you should normally have the opportunity to ask questions, the panel is able to ask questions; you will present your case and evidence be questioned by the panel. You are also able to call witnesses and submit witness statements/evidence.

The Board will decide if there is misconduct and/or if a professional code has been breached and how serious. The Board may impose one or more of the penalties listed at Section 3.8.5 (Student Handbook of Regulations) and/or may withdraw a student from a professional programme.

Use of Social Networking

You should not be making comments on social networking sites which may cause distress or offence to staff, students or individuals in the workplace. You should think carefully about what you post. If issues of concern are raised then the University may investigate and take disciplinary action.
Appendix 3 of the Handbook of Student Regulations states:

Social networking sites are now widely used for both socialising and work. They are readily accessible and offer an immediate means of communication. However, they are relatively public and posted comments may be stored permanently. Care must therefore be taken not to cause offence or distress when making comments about individuals or their work, including University staff and students. The University has regulations to reduce the risks of individuals being distressed by the comments of others, whether said or in writing, and will take **disciplinary action** where relevant in such cases. There is also a body of criminal law dealing with libel and slander. The following points should therefore be borne in mind when using any website discussion forum:

**Good Practice**

- Never say anything that may cause distress to others
- Remember that unknown others may see what you have to say
- Remember that your comments may be saved and become a permanent record
- Therefore always think before writing any comments about others, especially if they may be in any way critical.

If you are facing disciplinary processes, you can discuss your situation with the Students' Union's Education Caseworkers. To discuss your situation and arrange further support, please email su.advice@northumbria.ac.uk or complete a registration form at the Base Info Desk by the entrance to the Students’ Union.