

## Complaint Policy and Procedures for Students

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 We at Arts University Plymouth make every effort to ensure that all students have the best experience possible while studying with us. However, we recognise that there may be occasions when you are dissatisfied with some aspects of your experience.

1.2 As a provider of higher education we are subject to regulatory requirements in relation to the way we handle complaints from students. Failure to operate such systems could constitute a breach, or an increased risk of a future breach, of the Office for Student's [initial and ongoing conditions](#) B2 (Quality) and C1 ([Guidance on consumer protection law](#)).

## 2. Guiding Principles

2.1 In accordance with OfS Condition C4 (ensuring that robust arrangements are in place for handling and responding to complaints from students) this Policy is designed to help you resolve any of those experiences.

2.2 This policy and its procedures are consistent with the [Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Code](#) and its sector agreed principles and key practices which meet the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). While the principles are not mandatory they continue to underpin the successful processes for appeals and complaints throughout the higher education sector, with Principle 12 relevant to this policy:

### Principle 12

**Providers operate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible, and clearly articulated to staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.**

#### Key practices:

1. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are accessible, robust and inclusive, and enable early resolution wherever possible and include information relating to recruitment, selection and admission.
2. Concerns, complaints and appeals policies and procedures, including information about them, are clear and transparent to students, those advising them and those implementing the processes. Formal and informal stages of the processes are clearly articulated.
3. Providers meet (where applicable) the national and international requirements of external bodies with responsibility for hearing or overseeing concerns and complaints.
4. Actions resulting from concerns, complaints and appeals are proportionate and enable cases to be resolved as early as possible.
5. Processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are monitored and reviewed to ensure they promote enhancement throughout the provider and operate as intended, to the benefit of students and staff.

6. Outcomes from concerns, complaints and appeals are used to develop and enhance teaching and learning and the wider student experience

**2.3 Students should feel free to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage or recrimination.** Our aim is to resolve issues of dissatisfaction as close to the initial point of contact as possible and to conduct thorough and fair investigations of complaints so that, where appropriate, evidence-based decisions can be made based on the facts of each individual case.

### **3. Scope**

#### **Who can use these procedures?**

3.1 The following people can use these procedures to make a complaint:

- students enrolled at Arts University Plymouth (higher education and pre-degree) and including those studying through distance learning
- students who have left Arts University Plymouth within the last two months (60 calendar days) - your complaint must be made within 60 calendar days of ceasing to be a registered student with only exceptional circumstances being considered outside of this timescale

3.2 You should not make a complaint using these procedures if:

- you are applying to study at Arts University Plymouth (refer to [Admissions Policy](#))
  - complaints may still be considered but there is no appeal process and the OIA (student ombudsman) will only review complaints from enrolled or previously enrolled students
- you are a student studying at an academic partner (see 3.3 below for exceptions - Stages 3 and 4 (internal and external reviews))
- you are a former student who has left Arts University Plymouth for over two months (60 calendar days)
  - a complaint may still be considered if you have exceptional circumstances such as the matter has arisen since leaving and was unknown before then
- you are a third party wishing to raise a complaint on behalf of a student; this includes if you are a parent, guardian, relative or the partner of a student (unless the student is aged under 18 and agrees to the complaint being raised)
  - a third party may represent a student in exceptional circumstances if the student is aged over 18 with reasons provided and written consent provided by the student
- members of staff (refer to [HR and Statutory documents folder](#) for separate procedures such as for Whistleblowing and Staff Grievances).
- members of the public (please see [Complaints from the Public Guidelines](#) on the University website).

#### **Students studying with an academic partner**

3.3 In accordance with the Operations Manual for Partnership Provision, you should initially raise any complaints with the Partner College using their own policy and procedures.

3.4 Any complaints should attempt to be resolved by the Partner and resolved at the informal (Stage 1) level if possible. If the complaint cannot be resolved you may raise a Stage 2 formal complaint with the Partner College where this should be investigated and resolved where possible by them.

3.5 If this is not resolved to your satisfaction and you remain dissatisfied after a Stage 2 formal complaint, you can lodge a Stage 3 formal review with us, by initially emailing the Deputy Vice-Chancellor ([rkirby@aup.ac.uk](mailto:rkirby@aup.ac.uk)). Complaints escalated to external review with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) will be administered by us when requested from the OIA, with Partners to support by providing any complaint and investigation documents as required.

### Complaints covered by these procedures

3.6 The following are the complaint categories as designated by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Under these procedures students may complain about matters which they have been materially affected by, relating to:

- **Academic Appeal** - complaints about academic matters such as assessments, progression and grades, including requests for additional consideration (mitigating/extenuating circumstances)
  - this would usually be a part of the academic appeal process however, may also constitute complaint action; Academic Registrar / HoCQS would advise
- **Service Issues** - complaints about the course or teaching provision, facilities and supervision
  - this would usually be the case if you were unhappy with a lecturer, the curriculum, timetabling, course resources (physical and digital) and general course-related facilities
- **Financial** - complaints about finance and funding, for example fees and fee status, bursaries and scholarships
  - This would usually be the case if you were refused a bursary or if there was a problem with your fees that does not involve Student Finance England for example
- **Equality law / Human rights** - complaints where you have experienced discrimination, harassment (see para 4), and/or that your human rights have been breached
  - this would be the case if you had been treated differently because of a protected characteristic, real or perceived such as a disability or your religion
- **Disciplinary matters (non-academic)** - complaints relating to disciplinary proceedings for non-academic misconduct
  - this would usually be the case if you were unhappy with the outcome of a disciplinary investigation either as a reported student or a reporting student
- **Welfare / Non-course service issues** - complaints about issues that are not directly related to your course, for example complaints about support services and accommodation
  - This would be the case if you were unhappy with the additional support provided or with the Students' Union for example and could also include wider non-course related resources and facilities
- **Fitness to practise** - complaints relating to your suitability to practise the profession for which you are training or studying

- Unlikely to be a case in AUP as usually the case for those in university courses that relate to a job-related qualification such as nursing, physiotherapy etc. However, fitness to study may be used if the complaint was as a result of withdrawal following a Support to Study / Fitness to Study decision.

3.7 The definition of a complaint is very broad and the list above is not exhaustive and your complaint does not have to necessarily fit into one of the areas.

## Non-complaints

3.8 However, not every concern raised with the University is a complaint. For example, the following would **not** be considered complaints:

- academic appeals or appeal outcomes (see [Academic Regulations](#)) (HE) / [Pre Degree Appeals Procedure](#)
- disagreement with academic judgement
  - academic judgement is a judgement that is made about a matter where the opinion of an academic expert is essential; for example a judgement about marks awarded, degree classification, research methodology, whether feedback is correct or adequate, and the content or outcomes of a course will normally involve academic judgement ([OIA glossary](#))
- recruitment and admissions (those applying should initially refer to the [Admissions Policy](#)) although depending on the circumstances the case may be considered under these procedures
  - these complaints cannot be escalated to the OIA / funding agencies, therefore the decision of the University shall be deemed as final
- complaints about matters which have already been or are being considered by the OIA, a court or tribunal
- a request under the Freedom of Information Act or Data Protection Act
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- a response to an invitation to provide feedback through a formal mechanism such as a questionnaire will generally not be treated as a complaint
- a comment made about the University on social media including on our own social media pages
- a complaint about private accommodation / tenancy agreements, including any accommodation providers that may have been endorsed by the University (complaints should be taken up directly with the landlord or letting agent and advice taken from an external service such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau).

## Early resolution

3.9 The purpose of early resolution is to attempt to quickly resolve concerns or complaints which are straightforward and require little or no investigation or before they become more serious. Complaints at this stage of the process may be addressed by any relevant member of the University's staff. An early resolution of a complaint, at Stage 1, informal level, will contribute to a continued positive student experience, reducing the impact of stress on students and time on staff involved in an investigation.

3.10 In most cases a problem or misunderstanding will be dealt with effectively by early communication. This may be between staff and students, through student representation at meetings with course tutors, involving the Students' Union, Student Staff Feedback meetings or through Student Voice meetings.

3.11 We strongly encourage you to bring a complaint yourself but recognise that some students may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own for various reasons, such as the process exacerbating mental health issues such as stress and anxiety or another disability. We recognise this and will support you if you are in this situation.

3.12 If you are unsure what to do it is strongly recommended that you speak with the Students' Union first or alternatively someone you are comfortable with, such as a Student Support staff member.

3.13 As mentioned in paragraph 3.1, the University will in certain circumstances accept complaints brought by third parties, as long as there is a valid reason and the **student complainant has given their personal consent under the requirements of the Data Protection Act (UK GDPR)**. This means you must give clear written authority, such as from your AUP Google email account for the third party to act on your behalf. Complaints made by a third party with your explicit consent will be dealt with in the same way and within the same timescale.

### **Anonymous complaints**

3.14 Complaints submitted anonymously will only be considered if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquiries. If, however, an anonymous complaint does not provide enough information to enable us to take further action, it will not be pursued.

3.15 Anonymous complaints or reports can still be useful and the University may give consideration to the issues raised, and will record the complaint so that corrective action can be taken as appropriate.

3.16 For staff members, if an anonymous complaint received contains serious allegations, it must be referred to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and/or the Head of Compliance & Quality Systems, without delay.

### **Complaints involving other organisations or contractors who provide a service on behalf of the University**

3.17 If you complain to the University about the service of another organisation, but one where we have no involvement in the issue, we advise you to contact the appropriate organisation directly. An example would be a complaint about a student letting.

3.18 If the complaint relates to a University service that also involves the service of another organisation the complaint may be handled through this procedure in the first instance. This could relate to complaints about services provided on our behalf through partner institutions, for example the canteen staff or contracted disability support workers.

3.19 If enquiries to an outside organisation in relation to a complaint are required, we will take care to ensure we comply with data protection legislation and the guidance on handling personal information. Such complaints may include, for example:

- a complaint made in relation to provision of third-party services
- a complaint made about a service that is delivered by a contractor
- a complaint made about a student loan where the dissatisfaction relates to the service we have provided and/or the service the loan agency has provided.

### **Time limits**

3.20 Complaints should be raised with us as soon as problems arise to enable prompt investigation and swift resolution. A complaint that is raised some time afterwards will be more difficult to follow up and may not be accepted other than where you can show good cause for the delay (such as independently certified medical or other extenuating circumstances) or if the incident or outcome from the incident was not known until significantly later.

3.21 This procedure sets a discretionary time limit of **90 days** from a student raising a complaint with the University to internal resolution, starting from when the complainant first became aware of the problem, unless there are special circumstances for requesting consideration of a complaint beyond this time. Complaints are usually resolved within this period.

### **Complaints about members of staff**

3.22 It is recognised that making a complaint about a member of staff is a decision not taken lightly. Such a decision may also cause additional anxiety, particularly if you have to face that member of staff.

3.23 Therefore, if a complaint is made about a member of staff, efforts will be made to ensure that the investigator meets with the staff member and/or their line manager (and possibly HR) within **two weeks** of a complaint being made, with updates provided. We will always ask first what action you would like to happen and if you consent to the staff member being spoken to and your name being mentioned as the complainant. If you wish to remain anonymous this will be honoured if at all possible but in some cases this may not be guaranteed. You would be informed if this was the case - for example if it would be obvious to the staff member who had complained.

## **4. Harassment and sexual misconduct**

4.1 Further to the information in paragraph 3 there is further recourse to make a complaint if you have been subjected to harassment and / or sexual misconduct.

4.2 Experiencing any form of harassment or sexual misconduct is harmful and causes distress and it is recognised that some students may not initially recognise this, or may need to wait some time before making a formal report - such as a complaint. Therefore, if you have been a victim, unlike for other forms of complaints, there is no time limit within the University for you to make a report of this nature, such as a complaint.

4.3 In these instances you are encouraged to report formally if possible. Consent will be requested from you (any reporting student or witness) before your statement / allegations are put to the person being reported, if applicable. Your name will not be disclosed to the reported person without your consent.

4.4 There may be times when you and/or a witness gives consent to take a complaint forward but wishes to remain anonymous. With complaints of this nature that does not mean that the complaint won't be taken forward as there are instances when a piece of evidence is sufficient to investigate an anonymous complaint or witness statement, for example a screenshot of a group chat.

4.5 A complaint regarding harassment and / or sexual misconduct is usually the trigger to start an investigation.

4.6 Any complaints of this nature will meet the requirements of OfS Condition of Registration E6 with regards to harassment and sexual misconduct. The Harassment & Sexual Misconduct Policy provides more information as does the University's Single Source of Information on the website.

## **5. Complaint Handling Procedure**

5.1 The complaints process is intended to provide a quick, simple and streamlined procedure with a strong focus on early resolution.

5.2 Students are encouraged to use the complaint procedures to complain and **not use surveys or social media** as a medium to make initial complaints.

5.3 We ask that you ensure you send your complaint to the appropriate person so that the complaint is handled in accordance with the approved process. Please do not send initial complaints to the Vice-Chancellor or the Chair of the Board of Governors, or other such office-holders. These office-holders may be involved at a later stage and as such should then see the complaint 'fresh' without already having made any assumptions.

5.4 Similarly, complaints should not be sent directly to the OIA or OfS. If a complaint is directed to a legal services professional, such as a firm of solicitors, they will almost certainly advise you to go through the University's procedures first.

5.5 Any staff member and in particular the Enquiries desk, Student Support or the Student Union should be able to signpost a potential complainant to the correct process or person.

5.6 It is expected that both complainants and those receiving the complaint communicate in a courteous and professional manner.

5.7 The procedures involved are at Appendix 1.

## **6. Free speech complaints**



6.1 An Office for Students' complaints scheme for complaints about issues of free speech was due to come into force on 1 August 2024. However, following a change of government in July 2024, the new government [announced its decision](#) to stop implementation of the remaining provisions of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and to consider the approach it would take. Further details were provided by the government in January 2025:

6.2 The pause in implementation has led to several changes to the proposed Act being scrapped. These include:

- amending the provisions in relation to the complaints scheme to give the OfS a power, rather than a duty, to consider complaints; the OfS would be able to consider complaints from staff and external speakers at registered HE providers, and the OIA will continue to consider complaints from students;

6.3 The OfS therefore does not have the power to intervene in student complaints unless the complaint is specifically about the OfS.

6.4 Further information is contained in our [Freedom of Speech & Academic Freedom Policy](#).

## **7. Academic Appeals**

7.1 It is important to understand the difference between an appeal and a complaint, as they are treated separately by the University and are governed by different procedures.

7.2 The [OIA Good Practice Framework](#) in line with the UK Quality Code, states that an academic appeal is defined as: "*A request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progress, assessment and awards.*"

7.3 An appeal should be lodged using the formal appeals procedure. For anyone unsure about whether to lodge an appeal or a complaint, advice should be sought from the Head of CQS or the Academic Registrar. Email [registry@aup.ac.uk](mailto:registry@aup.ac.uk).

## **8. Guidance**

8.1 We aim to provide all students with a learning environment which is supportive, fair and intellectually challenging and free of discrimination and provides services in an efficient and friendly manner. The levels of service that you may expect from us are outlined in the generic [Student Handbooks](#) and in specific course handbooks and documentation. Students are asked to raise issues as soon as possible and be reasonable and open-minded in finding a resolution.

8.2 These procedures are intended to assist you in how complaints should be pursued in general and are intended to be easy to navigate and responsive to students' needs, helping to resolve problems in an effective way. If you have any suggestions on how this may be improved please do so either through the Students' Union or via Student Staff Feedback meetings or Student Voice. Alternatively email [jwright@aup.ac.uk](mailto:jwright@aup.ac.uk).

## **9. Frivolous or vexatious complaints**

**Students will not be discriminated against or suffer any recrimination as a consequence of making a complaint.**

9.1 However, we expect that students do not engage in making frivolous or vexatious complaints; the generally accepted meanings of these words are as follows:

- Frivolous – trivial, trifling or futile, not serious
- Vexatious – causing or tending to cause irritation or distress; not having sufficient grounds for action and seeking only to cause annoyance

9.2 We reserve the right to investigate complaints that are judged to be frivolous or vexatious or if they are obsessive, harassing, or repetitive, with unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes or demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

9.3 In such cases, we will respond to state the reasons why the complaint is not being followed up with details of how to appeal against such a decision.

9.4 In extreme cases such as a complaint that is deliberately vexatious, disciplinary action may be considered.

## **10. Data Protection**

10.1 If **aged 18 years and over** it should be noted that, under Data Protection legislation, we cannot deal with third party complaints unless a third party has been formally authorised or instructed to act on a student's behalf - usually with a reason why the student cannot complain themselves.

10.2 If a students' relative, partner or friend wishes to raise a complaint it will be rejected unless written consent is obtained from the student. However, parents/partners etc. are able to support a student complainant, for example by accompanying them to meetings and helping them write the complaint.

**It is re-emphasised that University values the open relationships between staff and students in these matters and strongly encourages student complainants to raise any complaint themselves rather than through a third party.**

10.3 If you are a student **under 18 years of age** we are not obliged to share information with your parents/guardians but do aim to establish a good, open relationship with anyone who you may have nominated as your point of contact. Pre Degree students will have the opportunity to opt out of information being shared with parents/guardians/point of contact.

10.4 With regards to the nature of information sharing, both parties (ourselves and you) retain the right to opt out or amend this arrangement at any time. For complaints arising from students who are **under 18 years of age**, our aim is to continue with an open approach and to work with both students and nominated points of contact as is appropriate in the circumstances and most importantly respecting the wishes of you, the student.

10.5 In some circumstances the outcome of the complaint may be subject to data protection legislation or confidentiality rules, particularly if the complaint is of a sensitive nature. If a complaint results in action being taken against a staff member, such as administrative or disciplinary action, full details may not be able to be provided, either to the complainant or to other staff members involved. However, wherever possible **data protection should not be a barrier to effective casework.**

10.6 UK GDPR provides the [right of erasure](#) / right to be forgotten as one of its principles. However, this right is not absolute and only applies in certain circumstances. Information on complaints is retained in the University for at least six years after the final correspondence. If you wish to have your complaint information removed as part of the right of erasure you should contact the Data Protection Officer who will address each case individually.

## **11. Governance**

11.1 Complaints are logged with a record maintained of the details of complaint, actions taken and outcomes. Correspondence gathered in an investigation is retained in a folder with access only to those involved in the investigation.

11.2 Records of complaints are monitored and reviewed on a termly basis as a quality system by the Academic Board, through its formal committee structure, to improve University-wide services. A report is made to the Academic Standards & Quality Committee each year following the end of the academic year with the data also reported to the Academic Board and Board of Governors to provide assurance that we are meeting our regulatory requirements.

11.3 In any report, the names and protected characteristics and specific courses of complainants are anonymised, reported for example as:

*'a Year 2 BA (Hons) student raised concerns about the standard of teaching on their course'*  
*'a MA student complained about the brightness of lighting in the Library'*

## **12. Accessibility**

12.1 These procedures are available on the University website, on the Staff and Student Portals (intranet) and directly linked from the Student Handbook - with an abridged, simplified version provided in the handbook itself. If the procedures are required in larger print or hard copy please contact the HoCQS as detailed in paragraph 13 below.

## **13. Online resources and contact information**

[OIA Complaint Advice for Students](#)  
[OfS page on Complaints](#)

The address for the University is:

Arts University Plymouth  
Tavistock Place  
Plymouth  
PL4 8AT

Email: [enquiries@aup.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@aup.ac.uk) (for enquiries only and not for complaints)

Telephone: 01752 203434

Further contact information for email is provided below:

| Position                                         | Name                              | Contact email                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Vice-Chancellor                                  | Professor Paul Fieldsend-Danks    | <a href="mailto:pfieldsenddanks@aup.ac.uk">pfieldsenddanks@aup.ac.uk</a><br><b>Stage 3 formal review only</b>                                                                             |
| Deputy Vice-Chancellor                           | Dr Robin Kirby                    | <a href="mailto:rkirby@aup.ac.uk">rkirby@aup.ac.uk</a><br>Advice at Stage 3 / external review                                                                                             |
| Head of Compliance & Quality Systems             | Jeff Wright                       | <a href="mailto:jwright@aup.ac.uk">jwright@aup.ac.uk</a><br>Stage 2 complaints<br>Advice at Stage 3 / external review                                                                     |
| Student Union Manager or Student Union President | Harriet Moore<br>Jasper Hutchings | <a href="mailto:hmoore@aup.ac.uk">hmoore@aup.ac.uk</a><br><a href="mailto:jhutchings@aup.ac.uk">jhutchings@aup.ac.uk</a><br>Stage 1 complaints<br>General advice / support for all stages |

## Appendix 1

### Complaint Procedures

The complaints process is intended to provide a quick, simple and streamlined procedure with a strong focus on early resolution.

If you want to raise a concern or complaint you are encouraged to use the procedures below to complain. These are set stages explained below.

#### Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

Stage 1 seeks to resolve straightforward complaints swiftly and effectively at the point at which the initial concern is made, or as close to that point as possible.

If you have a complaint you are encouraged to raise it initially at the point of, or as close to the point of becoming aware of it as possible and to raise it with the department or service area in which the issue arose - if you feel comfortable doing so.

This should usually be resolved at course level or within the area concerned, such as through a tutor or course leader. Alternatively, intervention by the Students' Union can also potentially resolve at this stage.

This stage should be completed within **five working days** or one calendar week of the complaint being made whenever possible.

Complaints at this stage may be made face-to-face (with notes being made if convenient), in writing such as by email and you may seek the advice or intervention of the Student Union President to assist in resolution.

Members of staff to whom complaints are made will consider whether an apology or explanation of what occurred would suffice or whether they need to direct the complaint elsewhere, ensuring you, as the student remain supported in the process.

#### Stage 2 - Formal Investigation

Stage 2 is appropriate if you have raised a concern or complaint and are not satisfied with the outcome or response at the informal level or if an informal approach was not possible either for personal reasons such as not feeling comfortable raising the matter or due the complexity or seriousness of the case.

In this case a formal complaint (Stage 2) may be raised by letter or email, or exceptionally verbally with a written account made, usually to the Head of Compliance & Quality Systems, as soon as possible. The complaint should include details such as your name and course being undertaken and detail clearly:

- what the complaint is (what happened, who was involved etc.)
- what action has been taken to date to resolve it (raised with a staff member / Students' Union etc.)
- what you would like as a resolution or an outcome (apology, change in process compensation etc.)

Include any relevant evidence such as screenshots, emails etc.

On receipt the complaint will be logged onto a secure spreadsheet and an investigation started. You will receive written confirmation usually straight away and **within five working days** that the complaint has been received and the process will be explained in this response.

You may be invited to an informal meeting if any further information is required or anything needs clarifying. If you wish, you may be accompanied by someone for support, such as a friend or family member, another student or staff member.

If for any reason the HoCQS is unable to investigate, for example if implicated or involved in the complaint, then an alternative, appropriate member of staff, of at least Course Leader / Senior Lecturer level or Professional Services equivalent, will be delegated by the VCE. It will be ensured that the staff member has the experience and necessary resources to investigate the matter.

The investigation may involve interviews with relevant persons who may be appropriate to the case. This may include staff and / or students and if an individual is being complained about they will be interviewed. Anyone interviewed may be accompanied by someone if required.

All necessary actions will be taken to investigate a complaint fully, setting out the outcome at the conclusion of this stage. In some cases that are more complex it may be necessary to convene a **Complaint Resolution Panel**, chaired by HoCQS, which will consist of three other staff members from different departments who will hear and consider the case before making a decision.

You should receive a formal written response within **20 working / business days** unless the complaint is particularly complex or if falling over periods when annual leave is taken. You will be informed if the time is likely to extend beyond this limit.

The formal response will explain how the investigation was carried out, who was involved and what resources such as student records, emails etc were accessed.

The response will detail the outcome including any decision to **uphold or not uphold** the complaint, if appropriate, and outlining the reasons in straightforward language where possible; we do this by stating whether the complaint is **justified, partly justified or not justified**, the same wording used by the OIA. This will help the complainant decide whether or not to pursue the matter further so the response will also include information on taking the complaint to the review stage, including timescales and where and how to access support.

### Stage 3 - Formal Review

If you are unhappy with the outcome of the formal response at Stage 2 and/or any action taken you may refer the complaint to the Vice-Chancellor, within **10 working days / 2 weeks**.

If you choose to do this you should write to the Vice-Chancellor by email or letter, outlining why you feel dissatisfied with the response, again stating the preferred resolution or outcome sought.

This review stage is to ensure that appropriate procedures were followed and that the decision was reasonable. This stage does not usually require a reconsideration of the issues raised, such as a further investigation unless the Vice-Chancellor or delegated Vice-Chancellor Executive (VCE) member feels it absolutely necessary. Complainants may be invited to meet to clarify any points raised.

It is important that both the reviewer and the complainant understand the purpose and scope of the review.

If the complaint is still **not upheld/justified** at the outcome of the review stage you will receive a **Completion of Procedures** (CoP) letter within **20 working days** after you escalated the complaint.

The CoP letter will include a clear explanation and outline the reasons for the decision in straightforward language. This will help you decide whether or not to pursue the matter externally and will include necessary timescales and the support and advice available.

If the Vice-Chancellor (or delegated VCE member) **upholds / justifies** a complaint, meaning they agree with you but you are still dissatisfied with the resolution or process, you have the right to request a CoP letter. This should be requested as soon as possible and not longer than a month after receiving the Stage 3 response.

#### **Stage 4 - Independent External Review (Higher Education Only)**

If Stage 3 is completed and you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, an application may be made for the complaint to be referred to the student ombudsman, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) for external review. The OIA runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. We are a member of this scheme (under Condition C2 of the [OfS Conditions of Registration](#)).

The OIA provides [Annual Statements](#) each year.

You can find more information about making a complaint to the OIA, what it can and can't look at and what it can do to put things right here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students> .

You will almost certainly need to have completed our own complaint procedures before referring the complaint to the OIA; they will usually direct you back to ourselves if you have not already raised the complaint internally.

## Stage 4 - Independent External Review (Pre Degree Only)

If you are a student on pre degree courses (or parent/guardian of a student under-18) and you feel the complaint (when formally notified as closed by the University) has not been adequately addressed after following this process (Stages 2-3), you have the right to take their complaint to the [Education and Skills Funding Agency](#) - the relevant details will be provided in the formal response.

In some cases it may be more appropriate to escalate the complaint to another external authority, such as the qualification provider, depending on the level of study. Again relevant details would be provided in the formal response with the Pre Degree Quality & Examinations Manager available to advise.

### Completion of Procedures letters (CoP)

If you are a HE student and you have exhausted our processes (completed Stage 3) but your complaint is **not upheld/justified**, we will issue you with a CoP letter automatically as stated above. You may then proceed to the OIA within 12 months of the date of the letter for an independent external review.

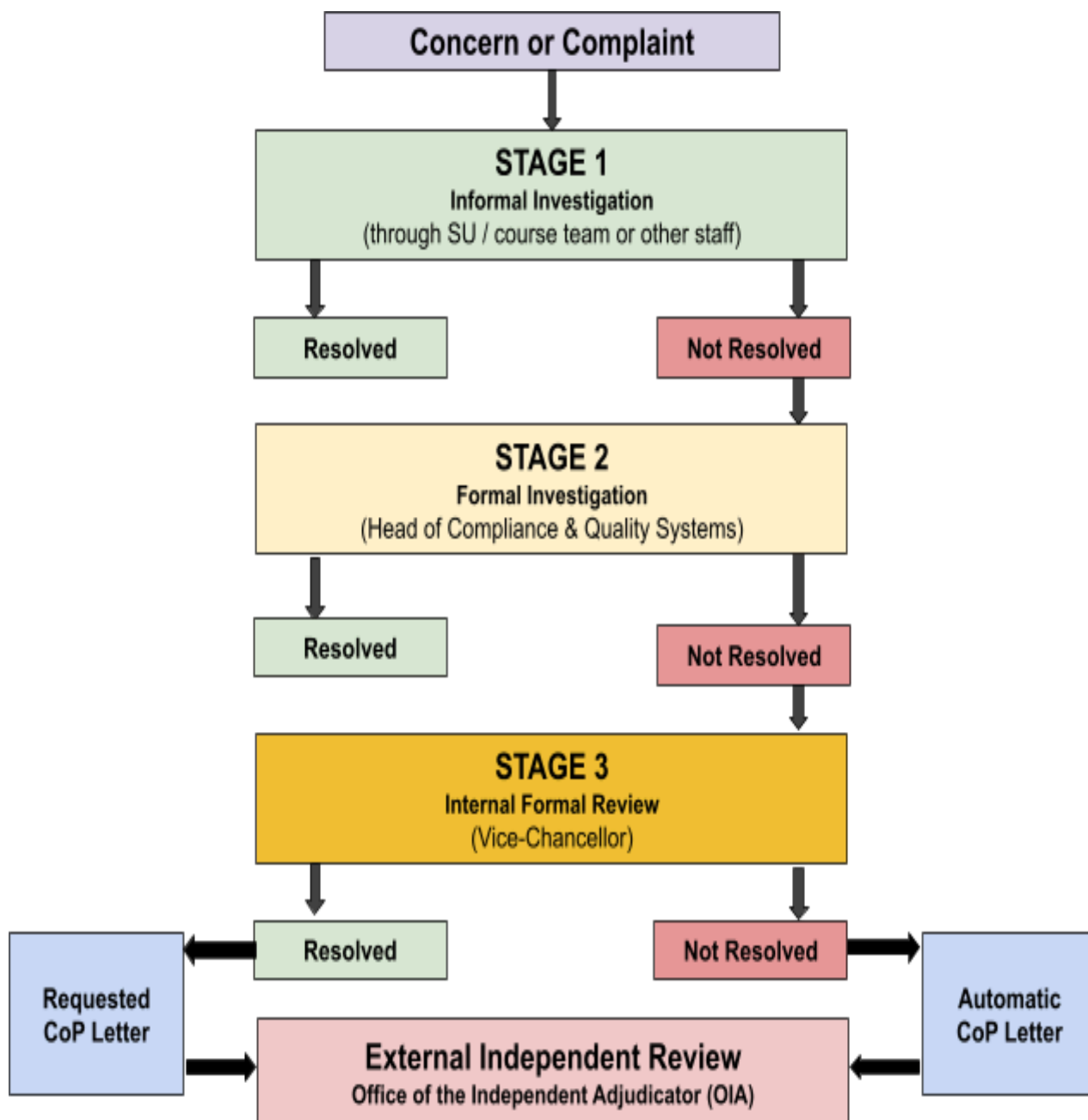
If your complaint is **upheld/justified** or **partly upheld/justified** you may still request a CoP letter if you want one. As above you would then have 12 months from the date of this letter to take your complaint to the OIA.

You can find more information about CoP Letters and when you should expect to receive one on the [OIA page on CoP letters](#). The OIA makes public the [annual statements](#) for each HE provider.



## Appendix 2

### Complaint Flowchart



| Document version control                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Document title:                                     | Complaint Procedures for Students                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Effective Date:                                     | August 2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Approving body:                                     | ASQC, February 2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Version:                                            | 15                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Amendments made this version                        | <p>Major updates:</p> <p>Upgraded to Policy with Procedures as App 1</p> <p>Change of tone throughout - we/you</p> <p>Update on franchised partners (3.1)</p> <p>Change to complaints covered (3.3)</p> <p>Complaints about members of staff (3.18-3.19)</p> <p>Harassment &amp; sexual misconduct (4.1-4.6)</p> <p>Update on freedom of speech law (6.2-6.5)</p> <p>Flowchart (App 2)</p> |
| Supersedes:                                         | Version 14, 8 Feb 24 (OfS amendments Aug 24)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Previous review dates:                              | <p>13 - 13 May 23 / 12 - 10 May 22</p> <p>11 - 11 May 21 10 - 12 May 20</p> <p>9 - February 20 - role title changes and reference to OfS Conditions of Registration</p> <p>9 - May 19 8 - May 18 (replacing Complaint Guidelines Apr 17)</p>                                                                                                                                               |
| Next review date:                                   | Feb 26                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Related Statutes, Ordinances, & General Regulations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Equality Act 2010</li> <li>• QAA Quality Code (Expectations for Quality)</li> <li>• Open University Handbook for Validated Awards</li> <li>• OfS Conditions of Registration</li> <li>• Data Protection Act 2018 / UK GDPR</li> </ul>                                                                                                          |
| Related policies:                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions Policy</li> <li>• Dignity at Study Policy</li> <li>• Equality and Diversity Policy</li> <li>• Tuition Fee Refund and Compensation Policy</li> <li>• <a href="#">VCAD Policies</a></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                           |
| Related procedures                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints from the Public Guidelines</li> <li>• Student Appeals Procedures (Academic Regulations)</li> <li>• Disciplinary Procedures for Students</li> <li>• Health, Wellbeing, Support to Study Policy/Procedure</li> </ul>                                                                                                                     |
| Related information:                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OIA: good practice framework; Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals</li> <li>• OIA: good practice framework; Supporting disabled students</li> <li>• QAA Advice &amp; Guidance: concerns, complaints and appeals</li> </ul>                                                                                                                    |
| Policy owner and lead contact:                      | <p>Head of Compliance &amp; Quality Systems</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:jwright@aup.ac.uk">jwright@aup.ac.uk</a></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |