

University Campus Oldham

HE Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

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HE Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The HE Student Complaints Policy and Procedure applies to all current students registered on higher education courses with UCO and should be invoked within one calendar month of the incident which is the cause of the complaint. Students who have left UCO may invoke this procedure within one calendar month of termination of their academic studies.

The HE Student Complaints Policy and Procedure covers complaints regarding any academic or non-academic service provided by UCO.

UCO will ensure that:

- No student bringing a concern or complaint under the HE Student Complaint Procedure will be treated less favourably by UCO. We will approach each complaint with an open mind and try to provide a satisfactory resolution in a timely manner.
- Staff will not investigate complaints about themselves or decisions that they have taken.
- All complaints will be dealt with in confidence.

The following procedure will take effect from June 2018 and supersedes all previous versions.

2 HE Complaints Procedure

- 2.1 Whilst University Campus Oldham (UCO) strives to achieve the highest standards in its provision of services, it does recognise that concerns or complaints will arise from time to time. The HE Complaints Procedure gives students a mechanism through which their concerns can be investigated and addressed. The HE Complaints Procedure comprises of three stages:

2.2 Stage 1 – Early Resolution

It is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved satisfactorily on an informal basis and close to their point of origin. However, UCO recognises that there may be exceptional circumstances where this is not appropriate, in particular where the issues are complex and will require detailed investigation e.g. where a complaint relates to the conduct of staff members or covers a number of different incidents. In these circumstances, a formal Stage 2 complaint should normally be made within one calendar month of the alleged incident or concern.

In most cases, therefore, initial contact should be made with the relevant member of staff who is responsible for dealing on a day-to-day basis with the matter being complained about. For example, if the complaint refers to an academic matter, the first point of contact should normally be the module tutor, personal tutor or course leader. Initial contact can also be by a spokesperson on behalf of a group, usually the Course Student Representative (at this stage of the procedure UCO would not require a signed statement from the individuals concerned).

In order that a complaint can be dealt with effectively and efficiently, it should be drawn to the attention of the relevant member of staff immediately, where possible, and normally not later than one calendar month after the incident giving rise to the complaint.

Once the complaint is reported, the relevant member of staff will normally discuss the complaint with you and other persons involved and make any other enquiries as appropriate, to determine whether it can be resolved without recourse to more formal procedures.

A written record of the outcome will normally be sent to you within 10 working days. This will be notified to the Faculty Lead where the effectiveness of the Faculty/Service could be improved, and may be referred to in the event that the complaint is progressed to stage 2. Where informal resolution is not appropriate or possible, you will be directed to the formal stage below.

2.3 Stage 2 – Formal Stage

If the student does not consider the complaint to be resolved by the response to Stage 1, then they may invoke Stage 2 of the Student Complaint Procedure by completing the Student Complaint Form. This should be submitted to the Head of Quality and Registry within 10 working days from the date of the final response to Stage 1.

All Stage 2 complaints are to be recorded on the Student Complaints Form and substantiated with evidence, attached to the form. Incomplete applications or late submissions will normally be rejected.

The Student Complaints Form requires the student to outline the nature of the complaint, confirm that Stage 1 has been undertaken to try to resolve the complaint, explain why the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, and outline what they would consider a satisfactory outcome to their complaint. The Head of Quality and Registry will acknowledge receipt of the complaint, and appoint an Investigating Officer, within 5 working days.

The Investigating Officer, who has not been involved in the matter under consideration, will investigate the complaint. Where a complaint arises within a Faculty or Service Department, the Investigating Officer should preferably be appointed from a different Faculty or Service Department. The complaint form shall be forwarded to the Investigating Officer to enable them to carry out their role. The Investigating Officer will normally meet or communicate with the student to discuss the matter in further detail.

The Investigating Officer will produce a report stating if the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or rejected, with a clear explanation on how this decision has been reached and any action the Faculty/Service Department intends to take. On receipt of the report, The Head of Quality and Registry will make any additional recommendations, if needed, and will communicate the outcome to all concerned.

It is anticipated that investigation of the majority of Stage 2 complaints will be completed within 20 days of the appointment of an Investigating Officer. UCO reserves the right to make a reasonable extension during vacation periods. The student will be kept informed of any delays in the investigation.

2.4 Stage 3 – Review

If a student does not consider the complaint resolved by the response to Stage 2, they may apply to invoke Stage 3 for a review of the decision. This request for review should be

addressed to the Head of Quality and Registry, in writing, within 10 working days from the date of the outcome of Stage 2.

UCO reserves the right to make reasonable extension to the timescales, for example dealing with complex issues within the complaint, or during vacation periods.

Stage 3 may only be invoked when Stage 2 has been completed. The student may not introduce any new issues of complaint at Stage 3.

Dependant on the nature of the complaint, the review stage will be handled either by UCO or the relevant awarding partner, as detailed below:

2.4.1 Complaints relating to Service or Facilities

The Vice Principal of HE and Higher Skills, or nominee, will conduct the Stage 3 investigation, reviewing the complaint. They will communicate their conclusions to the student, in writing, within 15 working days of receipt of the Stage 3 notification.

Following the conclusion of a Stage 3 review by UCO, a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued by UCO, in line with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator guidelines.

2.4.2 Complaints relating to Academic Standards or Learning Opportunity

If students are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint once they have exhausted all stages of the UCO HE Student Complaints Procedure, and their complaint relates to Academic Standards or Learning Opportunity, they have a right to appeal to the relevant awarding partner for review of their complaint. Students wishing to invoke this stage should contact the Head of Quality and Registry, within 10 working days of receiving their Stage 2 outcome, and they will be advised on how to proceed.

Following the review, the awarding partner will communicate their conclusions to the student, in writing, within 15 working days of receipt of the Stage 3 notification.

Following the conclusion of a Stage 3 review with an awarding partner, a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued by the awarding partner, in line with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator guidelines.

2.5 Independent review of HE Student Complaints

If a student does not consider the complaint resolved by any prior stage of this Procedure, they may direct their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for review. To do this, all prior stages available must have been exhausted, as detailed in this Procedure. If a concern reaches this stage, UCO will provide the student with full information on how to proceed. Any complaint directed to the OIA must be made in writing within 3 months of receiving a Completion of Procedures letter.

3 Operational Conditions

3.1 The HE Student Complaints Procedure cannot be used for matters relating to assessment performance and academic judgement, except where there is a complaint about a service provided which has to be resolved before an appeal decision can be made via the Academic Appeals Procedure of the relevant awarding partner.

3.2 Group Complaints

UCO will consider a group complaint, but the group must identify, on the Student Complaint Form, one person as spokesperson and correspondent. All students must agree, in writing, that the spokesperson is acting on his/her behalf, and must be able to demonstrate that he/she had been affected by the subject of the complaint application. No additional students can be added to the complaint application once submitted.

3.3 Anonymous Complaints

The HE Student Complaints Procedure can only be effective if a complaint can be satisfactorily investigated. Clearly, this is not possible where complaints are submitted anonymously and these complaints would not normally be considered.

3.4 Third Party Complaints

UCO will not investigate a third party complaint unless it receives a signed statement from the student (not via email), authorising the individual bringing the complaint to act on his/her behalf. This includes complaints submitted by a parent, spouse, guardian or legal representative.

3.5 Frivolous, Vexatious or Malicious Complaints

UCO would consider invoking the Student Disciplinary Procedure where complaints are found to be vexatious, frivolous or malicious, this being defined as trivial, untrue or wholly without substance or merit. Students or their representatives who are found to be aggressive, offensive or abusive, or where demands are deemed unreasonable or unreasonably persistent, will not be dealt with under this Procedure.

3.6 Confidentiality

Information used in this Procedure will be treated confidentially and only disclosed to those staff investigating and responding to the complaint, and as may be necessary to progress the complaint.

Any information gathered during this Procedure may be made available for other organisational processes, for example, an academic appeal or as part of a review of the complaint by the relevant awarding partner.

Any individual about whom a complaint is made will have the right to be informed of the fact and nature of the complaint by their line manager.

3.7 Timing of communications

UCO will ensure that all complaints are dealt with as promptly as possible, and would expect the organisation and the student to respond to all correspondence within the number of days prescribed within the procedure. However, UCO reserves the right to make reasonable extensions during vacation periods.

The process should normally be completed within the timescales of the Procedure, however, there may be circumstances where the timescales cannot be met. When this occurs UCO will keep the student and Faculty updated on progress. UCO also expects students and Faculty to meet the timescales when communicating to UCO, unless there is evidence of exceptional circumstances beyond reasonable control of the student and/or Faculty.

All references to timescales in the Procedure relate to working days, excluding Christmas closure and statutory Bank Holidays.

4 Monitoring and Evaluation

- 4.1 The Head of HE Quality and Registry will oversee the tracking of complaints progressed through the procedure, in consultation with the Director of HE Curriculum. A written report will be submitted annually to the UCO Quality Improvement Committee and the HE Advisory Board. The report will provide statistical data and identify any trends or wider issues, with recommendations to assist UCO on further good practice in the management of the HE Student Complaints Procedure.