

# Student Complaints Policy

October 2021



**Harper Adams  
University**

## STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY

### **The Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)**

The University is a member of the OIA's independent scheme to review student complaints. If you remain dissatisfied, having reached the end of the procedures outlined in this policy, you may wish to see whether your complaint is eligible for external review by the OIA. Further information can be found later in the policy and on the [OIA website](https://www.oiahe.org.uk/) <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>.

### 1. What is the purpose of this policy?

At Harper Adams University, we strive to achieve the highest standards in the provision of our services. However, we recognise that things do not always go to plan and, from time to time, there will be occasions where students may wish to raise an issue of dissatisfaction via a complaint.

This policy outlines the process that students should follow should they wish to raise a complaint and how the University will handle any such concerns.

For the purposes of this procedure, we define a complaint as:

*“An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about the University’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the University.”*

Examples of complaints include but are not limited to:

- Poor quality of University facilities, learning resources or teaching;
- Failure by the University to provide a service promised to you, for example in your Course Handbook;
- Misleading or incorrect information provided to you by the University about your course;
- Poor treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor;
- Refusal of a reasonable adjustment request by a disabled student under the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

If you are unsure whether this policy is appropriate for your circumstances, please seek advice by emailing [studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk).

### 2. Who is this policy for?

This policy is for students registered on Harper Adams University programmes, or those who have recently left, who wish to raise a complaint about their experience during their time studying with us. There are separate arrangements for:

- Short course participants, available on request by emailing [scco@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:scco@harper-adams.ac.uk);
- Those studying on programmes under a sub-contractual/validation arrangement (AMTRA Ltd, BASIS Registration Ltd, Improve International Ltd and Askham Bryan College at time of writing), who should consult that organisation’s separate policy;
- Members of the public, who should email [StudentServices@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:StudentServices@harper-adams.ac.uk) should they wish to raise a concern about a student or [VCO@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:VCO@harper-adams.ac.uk) for any other complaint.

Students are normally expected to engage with the policy themselves, however, where they are unable to do so, the University may agree for a representative to act on their behalf.

### 3. Where can I find support?

The Student Advisor ([StudentServices@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:StudentServices@harper-adams.ac.uk)) is able to advise students on preparing a formal complaint. Should you wish to ask for advice from a non-staff member, the [Students’ Union Director](#) is available to help.

If you have been affected by the circumstances of your complaint and need to talk to somebody, you can seek wellbeing support from Student Services ([wellbeing@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeing@harper-adams.ac.uk)) or from the Student Assistance Programme, our 24/7 telephone helpline (0800 0283766).

#### 4. What are our principles and our approach?

We treat all complaints seriously and endeavour to resolve all concerns informally and as close to the point of dissatisfaction as possible. As well as satisfying the good practice principles set out by the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)<sup>1</sup>, we commit to dealing with all complaints according to three overarching values: Fairness, Transparency and Timeliness.

##### Fairness

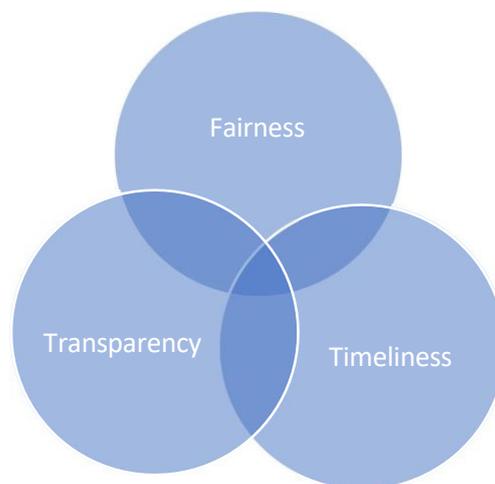
- We allow each party an opportunity to present their case and each party will be offered support
- We ensure that decisions are taken by people without conflicts of interest.
- We expect all parties involved in the procedure to act reasonably and fairly towards each other. Where this expectation is contravened, we will refer to our student and staff disciplinary procedures.
- We reserve the right to terminate or suspend our complaints procedures where we become aware that police, legal, court or tribunal proceedings have been initiated in relation to the issues raised in the complaint. Similarly, if there are allegations of a criminal offence, we may refer the matter to the police and suspend our own proceedings until the outcome of any police investigation or criminal proceedings are known, other than where we deem it appropriate to act in the interests of the safety and wellbeing of students, staff and/or third parties, including visitors.
- We will reject complaints deemed to be frivolous or vexatious<sup>2</sup>.
- All complaints will be managed in a sensitive way, with appropriate levels of confidentiality.
- The standard of proof to be applied shall be that used in civil court cases i.e. on a balance of probabilities.

##### Transparency

- We communicate clearly and in writing to complainants about how their complaint has been handled and the reasons why decisions have been taken.
- We capture complaint information centrally and share anonymised data with relevant boards/committees so that learnings can be used to improve the student experience.
- We liaise with the OIA during any external, independent review, following the completion of our procedures.
- Anonymous complaints will be investigated if they present compelling evidence or are high risk in nature. The University will not respond directly to an anonymous complainant in order to preserve their anonymity.

##### Timeliness

- We endeavour to resolve all complaints as swiftly as possible (according to timescales in section 5), whilst ensuring they are given sufficient attention.
- We operate our procedures in accordance with the best practice set out by the OIA.
- We will notify you if, for good reason, we need to extend our normal timescales, and keep you regularly informed of progress.
- We apply discretion in terms of investigating complaints which are made outside the normal time limits that were delayed for good reason.



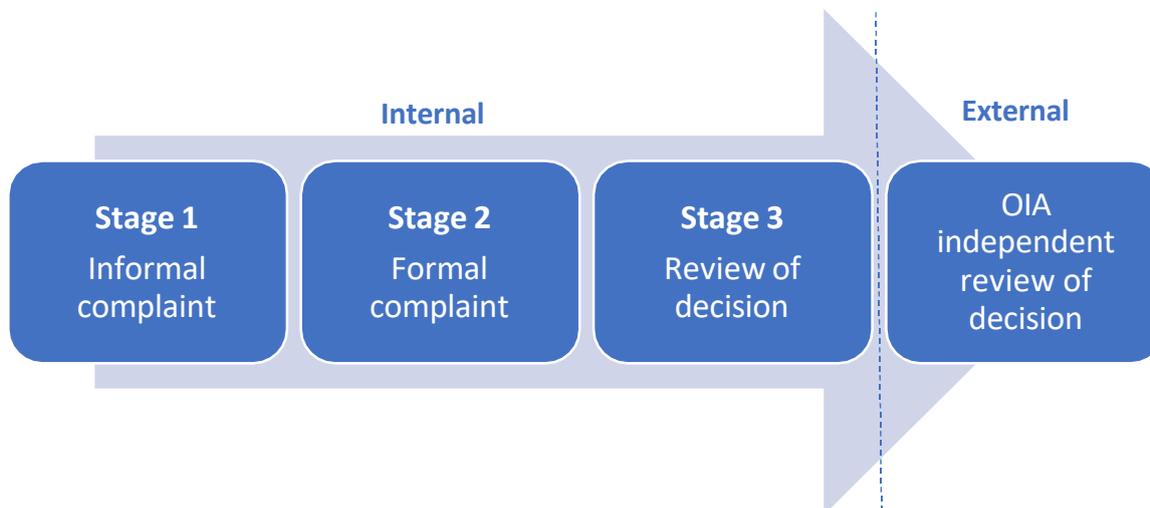
<sup>1</sup> As set out in the *Good practice framework: handling student complaints and academic appeals* (<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/1859/oia-good-practice-framework.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> At the discretion of the Director of Student Experience and Academic Services.

The University will consider group complaints where circumstances have affected a number of students. Where students wish to be part of a group complaint, they should confirm in writing to [studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk) that they nominate an individual spokesperson to act and correspond on their behalf.

## 5. Procedure

Our procedure consists of three internal stages, followed by the opportunity for you to refer your complaint externally to the OIA should you remain dissatisfied.



The table below outlines which stage is most appropriate for your circumstances, when and how to raise your complaint, and what will happen next.

	<b>Stage 1 Informal complaint</b>	<b>Stage 2 Formal complaint</b>	<b>Stage 3 Review of decision</b>
<b>Which stage does my complaint fall under?</b>	For raising a straightforward complaint.	For complaints which have not been resolved to your satisfaction at Stage 1, or for high-risk and/or complex complaints <sup>3</sup> .	For complaints which have not been resolved to your satisfaction at Stage 2.
<b>When should I raise my complaint?</b>	As close as possible to the issue occurring (and within 28 calendar days, except in exceptional circumstances).	Within 14 calendar days of receiving the written response to your Stage 1 complaint, or within 28 calendar days of a high-risk / complex issue occurring (except in exceptional circumstances).	Within 7 calendar days of receiving the written response to your Stage 2 complaint.
<b>How do I raise my complaint?</b>	By email, phone or in person to the member of staff with responsibility for the area of concern (Head of Department / Service) <sup>4</sup> . This person will be the Stage 1 complaint handler	By emailing <a href="mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk">studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk</a> , attaching your Stage 1 written response, your reason(s) for escalating your complaint, any relevant evidence and the outcome you are hoping for.	By emailing <a href="mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk">studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk</a> , attaching your Stage 2 written response and stating which of the following permitted grounds for a review apply:

<sup>3</sup> As determined by the Director of Student Experience and Academic Services.

<sup>4</sup> If you are unsure as to who to contact, please email [studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk) for advice. Where a complaint spans across a number of departments, the Director of Student Experience and Academic Services will nominate one Head of Department / Service to handle the complaint.

	<b>Stage 1 Informal complaint</b>	<b>Stage 2 Formal complaint</b>	<b>Stage 3 Review of decision</b>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The correct procedures were not followed at Stage 2;</li> <li>• The outcome at Stage 2 was unreasonable;</li> <li>• New material evidence is available which could not be provided at Stage 2.</li> </ul>
<b>How will my complaint be dealt with?</b>	The Stage 1 complaint handler will normally have a conversation with you to discuss the issues raised and may conduct some limited investigation.	You will receive an acknowledgement email which will include the name of the Stage 2 complaint handler (typically the Academic Registrar, or nominee), who will be independent of the area of concern. The Stage 2 complaint handler will conduct a full investigation, which may include meeting with you <sup>5</sup> . We give you the opportunity to bring a supporter to a meeting concerning your complaint. You could ask a member of university staff, another registered student or a member of the Students' Union as a supporter.	You will receive an acknowledgement email which will include the name of the Stage 3 complaint handler (a member of the University Executive team, nominated by the Director of Student Experience and Academic Services), who will be independent of the area of concern. The Stage 3 complaint handler will conduct a review of the investigation at Stage 2 and may follow additional lines of enquiry.
<b>What outcome might I receive?</b>	Action to resolve the problem quickly (e.g. an apology, an explanation or mediation) and a written response, normally within 21 calendar days.	You will be provided with a full, objective and proportionate written response, which will include the reasons for any decisions taken or recommended next steps, normally within 28 calendar days.	You will be provided with a full, objective and proportionate Completion of Procedures letter, normally within 28 calendar days. The Stage 3 case handler is unable to overturn the Stage 2 outcome, but may refer the matter back to the Stage 2 case handler for reconsideration within 14 calendar days.
<b>How will my complaint be recorded?</b>	The Stage 1 complaint handler will send all written responses to <a href="mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk">studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk</a> for anonymous recording centrally.	The Stage 2 complaint handler will send their written response to <a href="mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk">studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk</a> for central recording in accordance with our records retention policy.	The Stage 3 complaint handler will send their written response to <a href="mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk">studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk</a> for central recording in accordance with our records retention policy.
<b>What are the next steps?</b>	If you remain dissatisfied, you can escalate your	If you remain dissatisfied, you can escalate your	If you remain dissatisfied, you can refer your complaint

<sup>5</sup> Should the Stage 2 case handler request to meet with you, you may be accompanied by a supporter (a member of university staff, another registered student or a trained advocate).

	<b>Stage 1 Informal complaint</b>	<b>Stage 2 Formal complaint</b>	<b>Stage 3 Review of decision</b>
	complaint to Stage 2 within 14 calendar days of receiving the written response to your Stage 1 complaint.	complaint to Stage 3 within 7 calendar days of receiving the written response to your Stage 2 complaint.	to the OIA within 12 months of receiving your Completion of Procedures letter, following your Stage 3 complaint. Visit the <a href="#">OIA website</a> for further details or to submit an OIA complaint form.

## 6. Who is responsible and what are our responsibilities?

<b>Role</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>Student</b>	Raise complaints as close to the point of dissatisfaction as possible.  Meet with the case handler on request.
<b>Case handler</b>	Complete an investigation that is fully impartial; declare any conflicts of interest in advance.  Provide the student with the reasons for any required extensions to timescales.  Provide a written outcome for complaints at all stages which is thorough and transparent.
<b>Planning &amp; Policy</b>	Trend analysis and internal/external reporting.  Managing the <a href="mailto:studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk">studentcomplaints@harper-adams.ac.uk</a> mailbox.

## 7. Relationship with other policies

This Policy operates within the context of the following:

<b>Action relating to:</b>	<b>Is dealt with via:</b>	<b>Possible external referrals:</b>
Requests for a review on a decision relating to academic progress or an academic award.	<a href="#">Academic Appeals Policy</a>	n/a
Complaints by one or more staff members dissatisfied with the standard of service, action or lack of action by, or on behalf of, the University.	<a href="#">Staff Grievance Procedure</a>	Police (possible criminal action)
Concerns or complaints about the behaviour of a student or group of students raised by a student including vexatious and malicious complaints.	<a href="#">Student Conduct and Discipline Policy</a>	
Dissatisfaction about the outcome of a disciplinary process.		

Concerns or complaints about the behaviour of a student or group of students, in Students' Union facilities and social settings, raised by a student including vexatious and malicious complaints.	<a href="#">Students' Union Membership Disciplinary Policy</a>	
Concerns or complaints by staff about the behaviour of a staff member or group of staff including vexatious and malicious complaints.	<a href="#">Staff Disciplinary Procedure</a>	
Concerns about institutional misconduct that may suggest wrongdoing, constitute criminal activity or a breach of a legal duty.	<a href="#">Whistleblowing Procedure</a>	
Proposed changes to university-wide practices, policies and procedures.	<a href="#">Respect Policy</a> <a href="#">Equality and Diversity Policy</a>	n/a

## Policy information

<b>Date of last review</b>	October 2021
<b>Individual policy owner(s)</b>	Director of Student Experience and Academic Services
<b>Collective oversight</b>	Academic Board
<b>Approval date</b>	November 2021
<b>Equality Impact Assessment approval date</b>	November 2021
<b>Date of next review</b>	Autumn 2024
<b>Date and description of any minor amendments made:</b>	