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UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN

UK Quality Code 2024: Institutional Mapping

Principle 12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes

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PRINCIPLE 12: OPERATING CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCESSES

Introduction

The [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (Quality Code) articulates the principles of UK higher education for securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality. The Quality Code is a sector-led reference point which can be used in a range of flexible ways. It enables providers to evaluate their policies and practices with reference to Sector-Agreed Principles and it aligns with key international reference points including the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG).

The Quality Code is comprised of two key elements: (i) sector-agreed principles; and (ii) key practices. Sector-agreed principles identify the features that are fundamental to securing academic standards and offering a high-quality student learning experience. Key practices set out how a provider can demonstrate they are adhering to the sector-agreed principles. There are 12 principles and each has a set of key practices which providers can follow to demonstrate how they are adhering to that principle.

Under the theme, implementing the approach to quality enhancement and standards, **Principle 12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes** outlines a number of practices in relation to appeals and complaint processes. In doing so, the Quality Code sets out the following: *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.*

In undertaking this mapping to the UK Quality Code, a number of stakeholders were consulted across the University to ensure that the information presented is as accurate and up-to-date as possible. Additionally, it should be noted that the information contained within each section of the mapping is current as at time of publication. Further updates to the UK Quality Code Mapping will follow on an annual basis and will be overseen by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).

Key Practices

Key Practices	University Commentary	Supporting Documentation
<p>(a) 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.</p>	<p>The University's Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals, including a glossary of terms, are on the University webpages, and are accessible to all. The Policy was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload. The Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) is also available on the web. The steps laid out in the procedures aim to ensure clarity of understanding for all stakeholders, as well as their consistent application. The University's CHP complies with the model prescribed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The University's Appeals and Complaints webpages set out the steps to be followed in the submission of an appeal and/or complaint. The policies and procedures are inclusive and allow all students, staff, alumni, prospective students and members of the public to raise concerns where appropriate.</p> <p>Where the policies cannot be accessed on the web by any individual, the University is able to provide hard-copy versions of the documents on request. If required, documentation can be provided in accessible formats.</p> <p>Policy advice can be obtained from our trained case officers in the Academic Services Team to support of the understanding and application of the policies and procedures. Additionally, students can seek independent advice from the Students' Union advice team at every stage of the appeals and complaints process. Further information pertaining to support for submission of an appeal and/or complaint is available on the University's Appeals and Complaints webpage.</p> <p>In the policies and procedures for Student Appeals and Complaints, emphasis is placed on informal, early resolution to all cases. We understand that, normally, where situations and cases can be resolved more quickly, the experience is usually better for those involved. Where an early resolution is not possible, appellants and complainants transfer into the formal appeals and complaints processes. They do, of course, have the opportunity to go to the formal process immediately if they feel this is the most appropriate route.</p>	<p>Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage) Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage) Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy) Glossary of Terms, Appeals & Complaints (Document) Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy) Status of Students Pending the Outcome of Consideration of (a) an Academic Appeal or Complaint; or (b) Undergraduate Student Progress, or Fitness to Practise (Policy)</p>

	<p>Our policies and procedures encourage constructive engagement, a transparent approach (e.g. in relation to timescales) and are person-centred. We aim to have in place the most effective and efficient experience for the individuals involved including the requirements for the evidence and submissions.</p> <p>All students entering into an appeal or complaint are treated in a fair and appropriate way and, if appropriate, procedures are put in place to accommodate students' specific needs. For example, these specific needs could include situations where students may be studying off-campus/online or if they have a disability.</p> <p>At all stages through the process, students are treated fairly and have the option to be accompanied to meetings regarding their appeal or complaint by a friend, relative or representative from the Students' Union aiming to ensure that the students are appropriately supported throughout the process.</p> <p>The University ensures that no student is disadvantaged by raising concerns. This aspect of our process is outlined in the University's Status of Students Pending the Outcome of Consideration of (a) an Academic Appeal or Complaint; or (b) Undergraduate Student Progress, or Fitness to Practise policy.</p>	
<p>(b) 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.</p>	<p>The University ensures that information is clear and transparent by providing all relevant information on the web (and through other means as necessary and as described in section (a)). In addition to the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals and the Complaints Handling Procedure, resources include a glossary of terms and the relevant forms required as part of the process. Within the policies and procedures, clear guidance on how to conduct meetings with appellants/complainants at various stages through the process is in place, alongside all other aspects of the required processes. The guidance regarding conducting meetings ensures a consistent approach which gives all parties an appropriate and fair opportunity to present their case and aims to ensure that all parties are treated with dignity and respect, and their well-being is appropriately considered. Further information is available on the University's Appeals and Complaints webpages.</p> <p>In addition, the Experience, Engagement and Wellbeing Team have a planned process of communication with students and, as part of that, information on</p>	<p>Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage) Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage) Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy) Data Protection (Webpage) Data Protection Policy (Policy) Glossary of Terms, Appeals & Complaints (Document) Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy) SPSO (Webpage)</p>

	<p>appeals, complaints and procedures are provided. Information is also provided to students in course and programme handbooks.</p> <p>The Academic Services Team can provide guidance to individuals on the procedures for appeals and complaints. Where individuals require support in preparing their own specific case, they are able to seek that from the Students' Union.</p> <p>In line with University Data Protection policies, information related to cases of appeals and complaints are only be shared with the relevant parties involved in resolving the case. These parties include the case officer, Head of School (or nominee) investigating the case, and School administration contact.</p> <p>The University's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) complies with the model prescribed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).</p>	
<p>(c) Providers meet (where applicable) the national and international requirements of external bodies with responsibility for hearing or overseeing concerns and complaints.</p>	<p>The University ensures compliance with external regulatory bodies and sector best practice. The University's Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals was designed in accordance with best practice across the UK higher education sector. Meanwhile, the University's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) complies with the model prescribed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).</p> <p>The Appeals and Complaints policies are kept under active review as cases are received and handled, and feedback from the SPSO is taken on board when received. The University has made amendments to its process as a result of feedback provided by the SPSO, particularly in relation to timescales for the consideration of an appeal and/or complaint case.</p> <p>Complaints data is published and made available on the University webpages, to ensure transparency and compliance with SPSO requirements. Annually data is presented to the Education Committee structure in relation to appeals and complaints to identify any trends, and to ensure that the policies remain appropriate.</p>	<p>Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage) Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage) Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy) Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy) SPSO (Webpage)</p>
<p>(d) Actions resulting from concerns, complaints and appeals are proportionate and enable cases to be resolved as early as possible.</p>	<p>The University's policies and procedures are designed and operated in a way that aim to be fair and impartial. The University seeks to ensure all parties are treated in a fair and appropriate manner. As such, suitably trained case officers are assigned to each case to ensure administrative processes are adhered to and the appellant/complainant is fully informed at all stages. These officers are</p>	<p>Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage) Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage) Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy)</p>

	<p>from our Academic Services Team and as such are always independent of the appeal or complaint investigation.</p> <p>In the submission of all initial stage appeals, the case will be reviewed by a Competency Panel who will determine whether the case meets the required criteria as set out in the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals and whether the case is in time. Impartial and trained academic staff investigate whether any appeal case is competent for progression. These academics are senior members of staff and are impartial to the case, being independent of the School in which the appellant is based.</p> <p>Where the cases are passed to an Investigating Officer, those mentioned in the case, or who may have previously dealt with issues raised in the case, will not be asked to investigate it, to ensure impartiality. Investigating Officers are independent of the situation. Trained case officers will also review the appeal / complaint response prior to issue to ensure any potential issues can be addressed prior to issue to the appellant / complainant.</p> <p>Where appellants proceed to the Grounds to Proceed stage, impartial and trained academic staff investigate whether there are grounds to proceed to a panel hearing. These academics are senior members of staff and are impartial to the case, being independent of the School in which the appellant is based. Consideration is undertaken by way of email and panellists reach a decision independently. Where disagreement occurs, a further panellist is sought and a decision is reached by way of consensus.</p> <p>In both the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals and the Complaints Handling Procedure, emphasis is placed on informal, early resolution wherever possible. Policies and procedures have defined timescales to manage expectations of those bringing forward a case, as well as to ensure cases are dealt with in the required timescales.</p> <p>When there is a situation where it is not be possible to meet the stated timescales, appellants and complainants are informed of the delay and are kept updated so that they are aware of progress and reasons for the delay (e.g. investigation of a complex case requiring extensive investigation).</p>	<p>Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy) SPSO (Webpage)</p>
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(e) 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.	<p>The University's Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals and Complaints Handling Procedure are part of the Education Policy and Regulations Review schedule and are monitored regularly. The policies are monitored and reviewed as appeal and/or complaint cases are received, which may have an impact on the process, policy or procedure being followed.</p> <p>The Academic Services/Policy and Quality team, within which the operational responsibility for appeals and complaints sits, continue to monitor and keep under the review for both appeals and complaints processes. The team meet regularly to discuss appeals and complaint cases, and to discuss any amendments to process that are required. Recent examples include the streamlining of process in relation to the Competency Panels, introduced in the review of the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals in June 2024.</p>	Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage) Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage) Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy) Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy) SPSO (Webpage)
(f) Outcomes from concerns, complaints and appeals are used to develop and enhance teaching and learning and the wider student experience	<p>The University's policies and procedures for appeals and complaints encourage feedback from our student population to ensure a high-quality student and academic experience taking account of both the academic environment and the support services that students may engage with. The feedback provided, by means of appeals and complaints procedures, or through other means, is used to highlight areas of improvement or concern which we can then address, and to ensure high-quality service delivery.</p> <p>The University reports annually on academic appeals and bi-annually on complaints data. Our data is analysed by School, level and mode of study. The reports are submitted to the Senior Management Team, Quality Assurance Committee, University Education Committee, Senate and Court for consideration and allow the University to monitor the numbers and nature of the submissions, the actions taken to address any trends that are identified, as well as ensuring oversight of the implementation of policies. As noted, these data are used to identify areas of concern and areas for action which aim to improve the student and academic experience. Complaints data is available on the University's Appeals and Complaints webpages for the most recent academic year compared with previous years.</p>	Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage) Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage) Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy) Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)