



QAHE Limited Complaints Policy

Prepared by: Chief Governance & Transformation Officer

Prepared for: Academic Board

Date: May 2026

Issue: 1





Version Control

| Document Information | |
|------------------------------|--|
| QAHE Complaints Policy | |

| Name | Viewed / Comments |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Director of Quality Assurance | Approved |
| Director of Quality Assurance | Approved |

| Revision History | | | |
|------------------|------------|---|---------------------------|
| Version | Issue Date | Author | Description of Change |
| 1.0 | 28/03/22 | Director of Quality Assurance | Administrative amendments |
| 2.0 | 10/05/2024 | Director of Quality Assurance | Administrative amendments |
| 3.0 | 20/05/2026 | Chief Governance & Transformation Officer | Administrative amendments |



Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Introduction..... | 3 |
| 2. Definitions..... | 4 |
| 3. Scope..... | 5 |
| 4. Principles..... | 5 |
| 5. Complaints Procedure..... | 5 |
| 5.1. Early Resolution (Informal Stage)..... | 6 |
| 5.2. Formal Complaint..... | 6 |
| 5.3. Review by a University Partner..... | 6 |
| 5.4. Review for Students registered on a QA Higher Education programme..... | 7 |
| 5.5. Applicants..... | 7 |
| 6. External Review..... | 7 |
| 6.1. Office of the Independent Adjudicator..... | 7 |
| 6.2. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman..... | 8 |
| 7. Where to Get Help..... | 8 |
| 8. Monitoring and Continuous Improvement..... | 8 |
| 9. Further Information..... | 8 |
| 10. Review..... | 8 |



1. Introduction

QAHE Limited (“QA Higher Education”), is committed to providing a high-quality learning and support environment and to ensuring students have access to clear, fair, effective mechanisms for raising concerns where service delivery falls short of expectations. In line with the expectations of the Office for Students (OfS), the principles of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Good Practice Framework, and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO), QA Higher Education is committed to ensuring that complaints are handled in a timely, transparent, and proportionate manner, with appropriate independence, objectivity, and consistency throughout the process.

This Complaints Policy sets out the framework for the management and resolution of student complaints relating to the delivery of services provided by QA Higher Education as a partner of its awarding university. It also provides clarity on routes of escalation, including referral to the awarding university where appropriate, and the student’s right to request an independent review by the OIA once internal procedures have been completed.

QA Higher Education will ensure that students raising complaints are treated fairly and without disadvantage. All complaints will be handled confidentially, with consideration given to the need to protect personal data and the rights of all parties involved where possible.

QA Higher Education recognises that complaints are an important source of feedback and a key component of effective governance, accountability, and continuous improvement. Complaints will therefore be used to inform service enhancement, identify recurring issues, and support the ongoing improvement of the student experience.

2. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Complaint: a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a student about QA Higher Education’s services, including acts or omissions, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Concern: a concern is a matter raised informally by a student, which may be resolved quickly without the need to initiate the formal complaints process.

Academic Appeal: an academic appeal relates to a request for reconsideration of academic decisions (for example, marks, progression, awards). Academic appeals are not covered by this policy and are managed under the awarding body’s academic regulations.

Academic Judgement: is not any judgment made by an academic; it is a judgment that is made about a matter where the opinion of an academic expert is essential. So for example a judgment 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 judgment.

Completion of Procedures Letter (CoPL): a formal written statement issued at the end of the complaints process, confirming that the complaint has been fully considered and advising the student of their right to request an independent review by the OIA.

Complainant: the applicant, student, or former student where applicable, who has submitted a complaint under this policy.



Letter of Outcome: a formal written statement issued at the end of the complaints process, confirming that the complaint has been fully considered and advising the student of their right to complain to the NIPSO.

3. Scope

This policy applies to complaints raised by students in relation to their experience with QA Higher Education from the point of application through to the completion of their programme of study. It covers all programmes delivered by QA Higher Education in partnership with the awarding university and QA Higher Education's programmes.

The policy applies to complaints relating to non-academic aspects of the student journey, including (but not limited to):

- The application and admissions process
- Administrative processes and services
- Academic and administrative support services
- The quality of the educational experience, including teaching and supervision
- The conduct, behaviour, or performance of staff

This policy does not apply to:

- Matters relating to Academic Judgement, including decisions on assessment outcomes, grades, progression, or awards
- Complaints relating to decisions made by the awarding university in respect of academic standards
- Issues arising from the actions of third parties not acting on behalf of QA Higher Education.

For guidance on the academic appeals procedure please contact qahe.appeals@qa.com.

Where a complaint includes elements that fall both within and outside of the scope of this policy, QA Higher Education will determine the appropriate process and will clearly communicate this to the student. Where a matter falls outside the scope of this policy, QA Higher Education will, where possible, direct the student to the appropriate process or body.

4. Principles

QA Higher Education will ensure that all complaints are handled in accordance with the following principles:

- **Fairness and impartiality** – complaints will be considered objectively without bias
- **Timeliness** – complaints will be resolved as quickly as possible within defined timelines
- **Transparency** – processes and decisions will be clearly communicated
- **Proportionality** – responses will be appropriate to the nature and complexity of the complaint
- **Confidentiality** – information will be handled in line with data protection requirements
- **No detriment** – students raising complaints will not be treated unfairly or disadvantaged



5. Complaints Procedure

QA Higher Education operates a staged approach to complaint handling in line with the OIA Good Practice Framework and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

5.1. Early Resolution (Informal Stage)

Students are encouraged, where appropriate, to raise concerns informally in the first instance to allow for prompt resolution. For instance, if the complaint is of an academic matter the student may wish to talk to their tutor or programme leader. If the complaint is about a QA Higher Education service, then the student should talk to an appropriate member of staff from that service. It is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved at this stage.

To facilitate further investigation the complainant should explain the situation as clearly and as fully as possible, including names, times, and dates and any remedy sought. In cases where a student is unsure of where to raise the issue or where they feel uncomfortable approaching the member of staff directly, they may discuss their concerns with a Complaints Officer who can be reached via the designated complaints inbox at qahe.complaints@qa.com. The Complaints Officer will attempt to facilitate communication between the student and the subject of the complaint.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing, and staff will seek to resolve the matter quickly and effectively. A written response will be provided where appropriate.

If the matter is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, they may progress to a formal complaint.

5.2. Formal Complaint

If a concern cannot be resolved informally, or the issue is of a more serious nature, the student may submit a formal complaint. Complaints must be submitted in writing through the complaint's email address: qahe.complaints@qa.com.

A formal complaint form should be completed in sufficient detail to enable the complaint to be properly investigated. Upon receipt of a complaint the Complaints Officer will act as an investigator. The complainant will receive a written acknowledgment that the complaint has been received within 3 working days. To investigate the complaint, the investigator may request further information and may ask to meet with the complainant.

The complainant may bring one friend or supporter (not normally a legal advisor) to any internal meeting. The Investigating Officer will aim to respond in writing within 15 working days of receiving the formal complaint, detailing how the complaint has been investigated, the findings of the investigation, any actions taken or proposed, and the reasons for the decision.

QA Higher Education will ensure that investigations are conducted objectively and proportionately.

If the timescale for investigation becomes extended the complainant will be kept informed of the progress.

5.3. Review by a University Partner

If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal complaint they can request a review by the relevant university partner. Each University has its own policy for complaints and details as to how a student can escalate their complaint will be provided by the Investigating Officer and can be found in the relevant Programme Handbook.



At the conclusion of this stage, the university partner will issue a **Completion of Procedures Letter** for the OIA and a **Letter of Outcome** for the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

5.4. Review for Students registered on a QA Higher Education programme

If a student who is registered on a QA Higher Education programme remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request a Review of the complaint. Requests must be based on specific grounds of:

- The Investigating Officer made an error in judgement or did not consider all of the evidence available to them
- The Investigating Officer did not conduct the complaint fairly, and/or not in line with this policy
- There is new material evidence that could not, for valid and evidenced reasons, be submitted at the time of the complaint

If a student wishes to proceed to a Review, they must submit details via the complaint's inbox qahe.complaints@qa.com, within 10 working days from the date of the outcome letter. Students must set out clearly the grounds on which a Review is being requested. If a Review request is submitted after 10 working days from the date of the outcome letter, the Review will only be progressed in exceptional circumstances.

The Review will be considered by a senior member of staff who has had no prior involvement in the matter being complained of. The Review shall either be rejected, upheld or partially upheld, in which case a resolution or a revised resolution will be proposed. The outcome of the Review will represent the final internal decision.

At the conclusion of this stage, QA Higher Education will issue a **Completion of Procedures (CoP) Letter**.

5.5. Applicants

If an applicant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request a Review of the complaint. If an applicant wishes to proceed to a Review, they must submit details via the complaint's inbox qahe.complaints@qa.com, within 10 working days from the date of the outcome letter. Applicants must set out clearly the grounds on which a Review is being requested. If a Review is submitted after the 10 working days from the date of the outcome letter, the Review will only be progressed in exceptional circumstances.

As there is no external process for applicants, the Review will be considered by a senior member of staff who has had no involvement in the matter being complained of. The Review shall either be rejected, upheld, or partially upheld, in which case a resolution or revised resolution will be proposed. The outcome of the Review will represent the final decision.

6. External Review

6.1. Office of the Independent Adjudicator

If a student is registered with one of our English university providers and is still dissatisfied with the decision, following completion of the internal process, the student has the right to request



an independent review of their complaint by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The OIA is an independent body set up to review student complaints and appeals.

Information on how to complain to the OIA can be requested via the complaint's inbox qahe.complaints@qa.com or there is a significant amount of information on the OIA website: [How to complain to us - OIAHE](#).

Students must normally submit their complaint to the OIA within **12 months** of the date of the **Completion of Procedures Letter** and must have exhausted the internal complaints process first.

6.2. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

If a student is registered on one of our Ulster University programmes and is still dissatisfied with the decision, following completion of the internal process, the student has the right to complaint to the [NIPSO How we deal with your complaint | NIPSO](#). The NIPSO is an independent body which investigates unresolved complaints about public bodies in Northern Ireland.

Students must normally submit their complaint to the NIPSO within **6 months** of the date of the **Letter of Outcome** and must have exhausted the internal complaints process first.

7. Where to Get Help

Students involved in a complaint may wish to access advice, guidance, or support during the process. Support is available from the Safeguarding Team, the Student Life and Wellbeing Team, and the Student Advice and Support Centre. These services can provide information, practical guidance, and wellbeing support to help students understand the process and access appropriate assistance where needed.

8. Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

QA Higher Education Academic Board has overall responsibility for the oversight of student complaints and, in discharging this responsibility, has delegated scrutiny to the Student Protection and Wellbeing Committee, which undertakes quarterly reviews of complaints, student feedback, and aspects of the learning experience; the Committee provides regular reports to the Academic Board to ensure effective oversight, monitoring, and continuous improvement.

9. Further Information

If you have any questions or queries relating to this policy, please contact the Complaints Team via the designated email address: qahe.complaints@qa.com.

10. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if required to ensure it remains accurate, effective, and aligned with legislation, regulatory, and organisational changes.

The Policy Owner is responsible for initiating and coordinating the review of this policy in line with the Policy Framework.



