

# Student Complaints Procedure

Classification – *Public*

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# 1. Purpose and Scope

## 1.1 Purpose

This procedure sets out how Arden University manages complaints raised by enrolled students and recent leavers (as defined in section 1.2) about the delivery of their learning experience or related services. It provides a fair, transparent, and proportionate framework through which concerns can be investigated and resolved.

## 1.2 Scope

This procedure applies to:

- Students enrolled on Blended Learning, Distance Learning, or Apprenticeship programmes delivered by Arden University;
- Students enrolled on programmes delivered with partner institutions where Arden University is the awarding body;
- Students on an approved break in learning; and
- Former students who have withdrawn or completed their studies within the previous 12 months and whose complaint relates to their period of enrolment.

This procedure does not apply to:

- Applicants;
- Staff grievances;
- Complaints from members of the public or partner organisations (other than students enrolled on partner delivered programmes); or
- Matters managed under other University processes such as Academic Appeals, Student Conduct, Sexual Misconduct & Harassment Policy or Fitness to Study.

Anonymous complaints will be considered at the University's discretion, although the University's ability to investigate may be limited if insufficient information is

provided or if the complainant cannot be contacted. Anonymous reports cannot normally receive direct feedback or support, but the information may still be used to identify themes, risks or areas for improvement.

Where a concern relates to serious wrongdoing, malpractice, or matters in the public interest, it may be more appropriately raised under the University's Student Whistleblowing Policy.

### 1.3 Apprentices

Apprentices are students at Arden University and access this Student Complaints Procedure on the same basis as all other learners. Only the apprentice (as the student) may raise a complaint under this Procedure.

Complaints or concerns raised by employers that relate to the wider provider–employer relationship, contractual expectations, or service arrangements fall outside the scope of this Procedure and should be directed to the appropriate Corporate Learning lead or manager.

### 1.4 Publication and Accessibility

This procedure is published on the University website, Student Hub and staff intranet to ensure transparency and accessibility for all students and staff. Alternative formats are available upon request.

## 2. Principles

2.1 The University is committed to providing a high-quality learning experience and responsive services for all students. Where concerns arise, the University will seek to resolve them promptly, fairly, and without disadvantage.

2.2 The following principles apply to all stages:

- a) Accessibility – the process is easy to locate and accessible to all students.
- b) Fairness and independence – Formal complaints are investigated by staff with no prior involvement in the matter.
- c) Proportionality – investigations reflect the seriousness and complexity of the issue.
- d) Confidentiality – information is shared only with those involved in considering or responding to the complaint.
- e) Timeliness – the University aims to complete the full process within 90 calendar

days of receipt of the complaint, excluding reasonable pauses.

f) Learning and improvement – information from complaints will inform staff development and quality enhancement.

g) Equality and inclusion – complaint data will be monitored by protected characteristic to identify equality-related trends.

2.3 Students will not be disadvantaged for raising a complaint.

### **3. Definition of a Complaint**

3.1 A complaint is defined 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.*

3.1.1 Whilst this definition applies to all complaints, students are normally expected to raise concerns with the relevant School, Campus, or Service team at the earliest opportunity so that issues can be resolved quickly and as close to the point of origin as possible. Where this has not been possible or appropriate, the matter may be considered under the Formal stage of this procedure.

3.1.2 Where a student submits a Formal complaint without first raising the matter with the appropriate service team, the University may refer the issue back to Early Local Resolution if this is reasonable and appropriate. This does not prevent a complaint from being considered where local resolution was not possible, was inappropriate, or has already been attempted.

3.2 Complaints may relate to, but are not limited to:

- a failure to meet obligations set out in student handbooks, policies, or contracts;
- the quality or delivery of teaching, supervision, or support;
- the adequacy of facilities or services;
- inconsistent information, communication, or application of University processes;

- incorrect, misleading, or incomplete information provided by the University; or
- staff or student behaviour not otherwise covered by another process.

### 3.3 Exclusions include:

- academic judgment, meaning decisions about marks, grades, academic performance, or progression that are based on academic expertise rather than procedural error (which must be raised through the Academic Appeals Procedure);
- matters already dealt with under other regulations or processes;
- routine requests for information or service;
- issues raised more than 12 months after a student's registration ended, as the University may be unable to investigate or provide a meaningful outcome where concerns are not raised within a reasonable timeframe.

3.4 A Completion of Procedures (CoP) Letter confirms that the University's internal complaints procedure has concluded and sets out the student's right to request an independent review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

### 3.5 Distinction between Complaints and Appeals:

3.5.1 A complaint is concerned with the standard of service provided by the University, including the actions or omissions of the University or its staff, and whether procedures have been followed appropriately.

3.5.2 An appeal is concerned with a challenge to an academic decision, such as an assessment outcome, progression decision, or penalty applied under academic regulations, where the student believes that the decision was affected by a procedural irregularity, bias, or other permitted grounds set out in the Academic Appeals Procedure.

3.5.3 The Student Complaints Procedure cannot be used to challenge matters of academic judgment or to overturn academic decisions. Academic judgment cannot be challenged under any University procedure; concerns relating to

procedural irregularity or other permitted grounds must be raised under the appropriate Academic Appeals or Academic Misconduct procedure.

3.5.4 Where a student submits a complaint that falls wholly or partly within the scope of another University process, the University may redirect the matter to the appropriate procedure. Students will be informed where this occurs and advised of the correct route.

3.5.5 Where a complaint raises concerns about the process by which an academic decision was reached (rather than the academic judgment itself, which cannot be challenged under any University procedure), this may be considered under the Student Complaints Procedure once the relevant academic process has been completed.

3.5.6 Where a student raises issues that fall within the scope of both the Student Complaints Procedure and the Academic Appeals Procedure at the same time, the University will determine the most appropriate way to consider the issues. This may include redirecting the matter under the appropriate procedure in line with 3.5.4 or coordinating the handling of the issues to avoid unnecessary duplication. Where appropriate, a single outcome may be issued addressing the relevant aspects of the complaint and/or appeal. Academic judgment will not be reconsidered under the complaints process.

## **4. Support, Representation and Accessibility**

4.1 Independent advice and representation are available from the [Students' Association Advice Service](#).

4.2 Reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure that students with disabilities or specific needs can participate fully in the process, including support with completing the complaints form or alternative methods of communication where appropriate.

4.3 Students may be supported by a friend, carer, adviser, or Student Associations' representative. This may include representation in written correspondence, where a representative acts on the student's behalf, or accompaniment at any meetings held as part of the complaints process. Where a representative acts on the student's behalf, written authorisation must be provided.

4.4 Information shared during the process will be handled confidentially and used only for the purpose of resolving the complaint.

4.5 The University's Wellbeing Teams can support students who feel the process may affect their wellbeing.

## 5. Direct Correspondence to Senior Leaders

5.1 To ensure complaints are handled fairly and consistently, students are expected to submit complaints through the routes set out in this Procedure. Complaints submitted directly to members of the University's Executive Team, including the Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellors, will normally be redirected to the appropriate process and will not usually be considered outside this Procedure.

5.2 Where correspondence is sent to members of the Executive Team that constitutes, or could reasonably be interpreted as, a complaint, the student will be advised that Formal complaints must be submitted through the Student Hub portal. The University will not process complaints sent directly to senior leadership and these communications will not be treated as valid submissions under this Procedure.

5.2.1 Redirecting complaints to the [Student Hub portal](#) does not disadvantage the student or delay consideration of their concerns. This approach ensures that complaints are handled consistently, independently, and in line with published timescales.

5.3 This ensures that:

- all complaints are logged and acknowledged;
- independence and consistency are maintained; and
- institutional learning and compliance are supported.

## 6. Timeframes and Deadlines

6.1 Complaints should be raised as soon as possible after the issue arises and will not normally be accepted more than three months after the event unless there is good reason for the delay. All complaints must be submitted within the eligibility limits set out in Section 1.2 of this Procedure.

6.2 In line with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework, the University aims to complete the complaints process within 90 calendar days overall. This 90-day period is an external benchmark and is measured in calendar days. Internal timescales for each stage of the procedure are expressed in working days, to ensure clarity and fairness during periods of University closure or reduced operation.

6.2.1 Where the complaints process is paused or extended, the University will keep the student informed of progress and provide clear reasons for any delay, along with a revised expected timescale for completion.

6.3 Typical timescales:

- Early Local Resolution: normally within 20 working days;
- Formal Complaint: normally within 30 working days;
- Formal Review: normally within 30 working days.

6.3.1 Many concerns raised at the Early Local Resolution stage will be resolved more quickly than the timescale stated above. The timescales set out in this section represent maximum expected timeframes rather than targets, and responses may be provided sooner where the issue is straightforward or time-sensitive.

6.4 Where an extension is required at any stage of the complaints process, the reason and revised completion date will be communicated in writing to the student and recorded by the Complaints Team or the relevant complaint investigator.

6.5 Interaction with Other University Procedures

6.5.1 Where a complaint raises issues that are also being considered under another University procedure (for example, Academic Appeals, Academic Misconduct, Student Conduct, Fitness to Study, or Sexual Misconduct & Harassment), the University may pause or sequence the complaints process to avoid duplication, conflict, or prejudice to either process.

6.5.2 In such cases, the student will be informed in writing of the reason for the pause, how the processes will interact, and when the complaint will be reviewed again. Any pause will be proportionate and kept under regular review.

6.5.3 Once the relevant University procedure has concluded, the student may raise a complaint about the process followed or the handling of the matter, but not the outcome itself, unless permitted under that procedure.

## 6.6 Internal Coordination and Information Sharing

6.6.1 Relevant University teams will work together to ensure appropriate coordination where a student is engaged in more than one formal process at the same time.

6.6.2 Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis only, in accordance with data protection and confidentiality requirements, to ensure that:

- students receive consistent information;
- risks are managed appropriately; and
- decisions are made fairly and with full awareness of related processes.

## 7. Early Local Resolution

7.1 Early Local Resolution is the first opportunity to resolve a concern quickly and effectively, at the point where it arises. It aims to provide a timely, proportionate response without unnecessary formality.

7.2 Student responsibility: Students are expected to raise concerns as soon as possible after they occur, and to bring them to the attention of the most relevant Programme, School, Campus, or Service team in the first instance. This enables issues to be addressed promptly and fairly.

7.3 Students should provide sufficient detail to allow the matter to be investigated and cooperate with reasonable requests for information or meetings. Where appropriate, they are encouraged to seek independent advice and guidance from the Student Associations' Advice Service before escalation.

7.4 University responsibility: All teams are responsible for taking ownership of issues raised, working collaboratively across departments, and escalating internally to a team leader or manager where additional input is required. Staff are expected to treat all concerns respectfully and to seek a mutually satisfactory resolution wherever possible.

7.4.1 Where a concern relates to the actions of an individual member of staff or a specific team, the University will take reasonable steps to ensure that the matter is considered by an appropriate person who is not directly involved, for example through escalation to a manager or another appropriate colleague.

7.5 “Live issues” such as system outages, sector-wide disruption, or service delays that are already under active investigation must be managed by the relevant area and should not normally be redirected into the Formal complaints process. Where issues arise that are outside the University’s reasonable control or affect large groups of students, these will be addressed through appropriate operational or academic mitigation rather than through individual complaints.

7.5.1 Where a student remains dissatisfied with how a live issue has been handled, they may submit a Formal Complaint once the relevant operational response or investigation has concluded. Such complaints will focus on the University’s handling of the matter rather than the existence of the issue itself. Live issues are not a separate stage of the complaints process and may be addressed through Early Local Resolution or other appropriate operational responses.

7.6 If a concern cannot be resolved promptly, or the student remains dissatisfied after the department’s initial response, the matter should be escalated within the relevant Programme, Campus, or Service area for further consideration before referral to the Complaints Team. The University may refer a complaint back to Early Local Resolution if this internal escalation has not been attempted and it is appropriate to do so.

7.6.1 Where a concern has been referred to Early Local Resolution and the student remains dissatisfied after reasonable attempts to resolve the matter locally, this will not prevent the student from submitting a Formal Complaint through the [Student Hub portal](#).

7.7 All escalated issues must be logged through the University’s tracking mechanism to support monitoring and service improvement. Students should normally receive a written or email response outlining the outcome.

7.8 Where Early Local Resolution is not possible or has been exhausted, the student may submit a Formal Complaint through the [Student Hub portal](#).

## 8. Formal Complaint

## 8.1 Submission

All Formal complaints must be submitted using the Student Complaints Form on the [Student Hub portal](#). The Complaints Team will acknowledge receipt within two working days. Complaints received by any other route will be redirected to the online form. Where assistance is required, a staff member may complete the form on the student's behalf, subject to student confirmation.

## 8.2 Eligibility and Triage

a) The Complaints Team is responsible for determining whether a submission meets the criteria for consideration as a Formal Complaint under this Procedure.

b) A complaint will normally be accepted for Formal investigation where:

- Early Local Resolution has been genuinely attempted, and the student remains dissatisfied; or
- it would be inappropriate or unreasonable to attempt local resolution, for example where the complaint involves serious allegations of misconduct, discrimination or harassment, or where there is an actual or perceived conflict of interest.

c) Where a submission relates primarily to customer-service dissatisfaction, live service delays, or matters that are already under active investigation or operational management by the relevant area, the Complaints Team may refer the matter back to the appropriate service owner for local resolution.

d) In such cases:

- the student will be informed in writing of the reason for the referral and provided with clear details of the appropriate point of contact;
- the referral will be recorded in the University's case management system for audit, oversight, and trend monitoring purposes.

e) Referral of a matter back to a service area for local resolution does not constitute a rejection of the complaint. Where the issue is not resolved to the student's

satisfaction, or where progress is unreasonably delayed, the student may resubmit the matter to the Complaints Team for consideration as a Formal Complaint.

f) Where repeated or duplicate submissions are received in relation to the same unresolved service issue, the Complaints Team may consolidate the matters into a single coordinated case with the relevant service area. This is to avoid duplication of effort, ensure accountability, and support effective resolution, and does not prevent individual students from receiving a written response where appropriate.

### 8.3 Allocation

Once accepted, the complaint will be assigned to a specialist Casework Advisor who has had no prior involvement in the matter and is able to consider the issues impartially. Casework Advisors are authorised to investigate the complaint and determine outcomes on behalf of the University.

### 8.4 Investigation and Outcome

Investigations are proportionate and evidence-based, involving review of relevant documentation, liaison with departments, and, if required, meetings with the student.

The University aims to conclude this stage within 30 working days.

The written outcome letter will:

- summarise the complaint and evidence considered;
- set out findings and rationale;
- state whether the complaint is upheld (in full or in part) or not upheld; and
- specify any actions or remedies, which may include an apology, corrective action, or a proportionate financial remedy.

### 8.5 Procedural Safeguards

a) The Complaints Team maintains full discretion to manage its caseload and may prioritise cases involving time-sensitive issues.

b) If a student attempts to use the complaints process as a substitute for ongoing service case management, the University may close or redirect the complaint, explaining the reasons in writing.

### 8.6 Learning and Accountability

Learning from Formal complaints will be reviewed periodically to identify recurring themes and inform service-level improvements. Data on referred-back complaints will be monitored to ensure that service areas are resolving issues appropriately and within reasonable timescales.

## 9. Formal Review

9.1 The Formal Review stage provides an independent review of the Formal outcome by the Quality Team.

9.2 Valid grounds for review:

- a) a procedural irregularity during the Formal stage with a material impact on the outcome;
- b) new, relevant evidence that could not reasonably have been provided earlier; or
- c) a decision that was demonstrably unreasonable in light of the evidence.

9.2.1 New issues or new complaints cannot be introduced at the Formal Review stage. New evidence will only be accepted where the student can demonstrate that it could not reasonably have been provided during the Formal stage.

9.3 Requests must be submitted to the Quality Team within 10 working days of the Formal outcome letter, using the Form and following the instructions provided in that outcome.

9.4 The Quality Team will acknowledge receipt within five working days and confirm whether the request meets the criteria.

9.5 A Review Panel of senior staff not previously involved will consider the case on paper and may seek clarification if required.

9.6 The Review Panel will not re-investigate but will assess whether the Formal process was fair, consistent, and reasonable.

9.7 A written outcome will be issued within 30 working days, setting out the decision, reasons, and any recommendations.

If not upheld, a Completion of Procedures Letter will be issued to enable referral to the OIA.

## 10. Independent Review

10.1 Once the University's internal process is complete, a student who remains dissatisfied may request an external review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

10.1.2 The OIA is an independent body that reviews whether the University acted fairly and reasonably; it does not re-investigate the complaint.

10.1.3 Students must submit a complaint to the OIA within twelve months of the date of the University's Completion of Procedures Letter.

10.1.4 Further information is available at <https://www.oiahe.org.uk>. Students may seek advice from the [Students' Association Advice Service](#) before submitting an OIA application.

## 10.2 Degree Apprenticeships

Apprentices registered on degree apprenticeship programmes may also refer their complaint to the Department for Education (DfE) if they believe the University has not handled their complaint in accordance with this procedure. Apprentices are encouraged to complete the University's internal complaints process first. Applications to the DfE must be made within twelve months of the issue arising. For further details and the contact email, please visit: [gov.uk – apprenticeships complaints](https://www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-complaints).

## 11. Suspension or Termination of a Complaint

11.1 A complaint may be suspended by the Complaints Team where:

- it overlaps with another University process (e.g. disciplinary or appeal); or
- it requires external information before progressing.

11.2 A complaint may be terminated where:

- the student withdraws it in writing;
- the student fails to engage reasonably; or
- the complaint forms part of a pattern of habitual or vexatious use of the complaints process.

A decision to terminate a complaint on the grounds that it is habitual or vexatious will only be made by the Complaints Team with the approval of the Head of Quality.

This does not prevent staff at any stage from managing inappropriate or abusive behaviour, including ending or pausing an interaction where necessary. Where concerns relate primarily to a student's behaviour rather than the substance of the complaint, these may be considered under the Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

11.3 Students will be notified in writing of the reason for any suspension or termination.

## **12. Group Complaints and Representation**

12.1 A group of students may submit a Group Complaint using the Student Hub form.

12.2 The group must nominate a spokesperson and provide written consent from all members confirming they are directly affected.

12.3 A single coordinated response will be issued to the nominated spokesperson on behalf of the group.

## **13. Unacceptable Behaviour and Vexatious Complaints**

13.1 The University expects all parties to act with courtesy and respect.

13.2 Unacceptable behaviour includes:

- abusive, threatening, or aggressive language;
- excessive or unreasonable demands;
- persistent refusal to accept a decision without new evidence; or
- malicious or frivolous complaints.

13.3 Where behaviour adversely affects staff, contact may be restricted. Any restriction will be proportionate and will not prevent the complaint from being considered to completion.

13.4 The University may dismiss vexatious complaints and issue a Completion of Procedures Letter confirming closure.

## **14. Complaints Involving External Providers**

14.1 Where a complaint involves a service provided by a partner institution or external contractor, including partner-delivered provision, the University will determine whether the matter should be handled under the partner's procedure, jointly investigated or considered under this Procedure, in line with the relevant partnership or contractual arrangements.

14.2 Where a complaint is raised by a student enrolled on a partner-delivered programme, the University remains responsible for ensuring that the complaint is handled fairly and in a timely manner.

## **15. Monitoring, Reporting and Continuous Improvement**

15.1 The University is committed to learning from complaints and using the information gathered to improve the student experience and institutional effectiveness.

15.2 All complaints, including those redirected at triage or referred to Early Local Resolution, will be logged in the University's central tracking system. The record will include the nature of the issue, outcome, timescales, and any follow-up actions.

15.3 The Complaints Team will analyse data regularly to identify:

- recurring themes and areas of concern;
- the proportion of cases resolved at each stage;
- issues or backlogs within specific service areas; and
- the timeliness of responses across the University.

15.4 Governance and accountability:

- a) The Complaints Team will monitor the number and nature of complaints redirected during triage and any patterns of service-level escalation.
- b) Persistent themes will be reported to the Students, Quality and Standards Committee (SQSC) and escalated to senior management where appropriate.

c) SQSC will ensure that service areas are held accountable for addressing systemic issues and implementing agreed actions.

#### 15.5 Reporting:

- Quarterly reports will be provided to the SQSC, summarising complaint volumes, outcomes, referral data, and learning points.
- Annual reports will be presented to the SQSC, Academic Board, and other relevant governance bodies to inform quality enhancement activity.

#### 15.6 Continuous improvement:

Actions and recommendations arising from upheld or partially upheld complaints will be tracked to completion.

The Complaints Team will work with operational areas to ensure that remedial actions are implemented and embedded in practice.

#### 15.7 Equality and inclusion:

Complaint data will be monitored by protected characteristic to identify equality-related trends and to support the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives.

#### 15.8 Record retention:

Records relating to complaints will be retained and managed in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy and relevant information governance requirements.

# Appendix A - Student Complaints Process

This diagram provides an overview of the Student Complaints Procedure. Full details, including eligibility criteria and timescales, are set out in the main body of this Procedure.



<b>Procedure Name:</b>	Student Complaints Procedure
<b>Procedure Reference:</b>	QA48
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<b>Record of Amendments</b>			
Date	Version Number	Details of Change	Approval