



# SPA Good Practice Statement

## Applicant complaints and appeals

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**October 2015**

Minor revisions April 2016

[www.spa.ac.uk](http://www.spa.ac.uk)

## Executive Summary

SPA has updated this good practice statement to take account of the [HE advice from the Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\)](#) on consumer protection. The advice stressed the need for HE providers to ensure their complaint handling procedures and practices were easy to locate, accessible, clear and fair to applicants and students. SPA has retained the original framework and considerations of the good practice statement, based on extensive evidence from the HE sector in 2012.

This statement looks at the definition of a complaint and an appeal, and at the importance of HE providers (outside Scotland<sup>1</sup>) ensuring that their definitions are as clear as possible for applicants and their advisors.

This statement provides information on external regulation and advice, and suggests that HE providers should always try to be open to resolving any initial query or complaint quickly and to the applicant's satisfaction wherever possible. The CMA view, that poor complaints handling can undermine your relationship with applicants and incur unnecessary time and expense is a reasonable one in terms of good practice and fair admissions. Investing time in early resolution of a complaint will free up staff time and ultimately contribute to the continued positive experience of applicants.

Within this statement SPA sets out the following recommendations for HE providers, which are drawn from evidence from across the sector:

- Define and distinguish between complaints and appeals.
- Have policies on both complaints and appeals specific to applicants.
- Make the policies transparent, intelligible, easy to find and readily available to all.
- Ensure all staff and others acting on behalf of the HE provider are aware of, are competent in, and adhere to procedures, regardless of where a complaint or dispute is first raised.
- Monitor and review complaints and appeals policies and procedures, in order to enhance good practice and ensure they are fit for purpose, and that they comply with consumer and other legislation/ regulation.

SPA provides a detailed set of considerations and accompanying checklist (appendix A) to support HE providers to update and develop their complaints and appeals policy. In addition, links to useful publications and examples of HE provider policies can be found at the end of the document, and a template applicant complaints and appeals form can be found at appendix B.

This document was revised in October 2015 and replaces the previous SPA Good Practice Statement on this topic issued in 2012.

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<sup>1</sup> In Scotland the definition is provided in law under the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) See: [Valuing Complaints: Scottish Higher Education Model Complaint Handling Procedures](#).

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[www.spa.ac.uk/resources/complaints-and-appeals](http://www.spa.ac.uk/resources/complaints-and-appeals)

## Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme (SPA)

SPA promotes fair admissions and access to higher education in the UK by developing and leading on good practice in the recruitment and selection of students. SPA is an independent and objective voice on UK higher education admissions. We work closely with HE providers and other stakeholders to provide evidence-based resources for providers to develop and update their admissions practice and policy to enhance quality, transparency, reputation and fair admissions.

For more information see [www.spa.ac.uk](http://www.spa.ac.uk)

### SPA Guidance and Good Practice Statement

Our objective is to provide good practice which supports HE providers in responding to changes in HE policy, practice and the legal framework impacting admissions and related areas.

Our good practice is evidence-based:

- from HE providers, stakeholders, national organisations, policy bodies and others UK-wide
- from conferences, events and discussions with HE colleagues
- from SPA surveys, research, and from HE providers' published policies and procedures

Using SPA's expertise and experience, evidence is analysed and synthesised into the good practice we produce.

SPA's good practice provides a wide range of staff in all types of HE provider, working with all types of applicants, with principles and examples to consider, use and adapt when updating their institution's policies and practices.

In the UK admissions standards, requirements, procedures, policies and decisions are the responsibility of each individual HE institution. This principle was affirmed in the Schwartz Report on Fair Admissions (2004)<sup>2</sup> and is set out in law.

### Disclaimer

This good practice statement is for general guidance only, and should not be taken as a list of obligations or a legal document. SPA emphasises that it does not offer legal advice and cannot take any responsibility for actions taken based on this information. Providers must always take their own legal advice as they see appropriate.

### Feedback

SPA's good practice statements are kept under review and updated as appropriate.

Your comments, queries or updates are invited and appreciated by SPA, please contact [enquiries@spa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@spa.ac.uk)

SPA

October 2015

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<sup>2</sup> *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice* – [The Schwartz Report, September 2004](#) (accessed 21 August 2015)

## 1. Introduction

SPA has increasingly been asked to comment on general issues or individual applicant complaints or and appeals, by HE providers, HE professional groups, national organisations, government departments and others. We have always stated it is not our place to review individual applicant cases, but these requests have highlighted the need to support providers in making their policies clear to applicants, and to recommend good practice in handling complaints and appeals.

This good practice statement may be of particular interest in view of consumer protection legislation, increased competition, greater availability and scrutiny of information and data, and a general rise in public awareness of consumer rights. All of these factors may lead to a rise in applicant complaints and appeals.

## 2. Background and key issues

SPA conducted a survey of HE providers in 2012 on complaints and appeals in admissions. The responses of 61 HE providers highlighted the following key issues and themes:

- There was variation in what providers counted as a complaint or appeal, and in how, or if, they were recorded and in who had responsibility for recording and monitoring.
- Complaints and appeals appeared to be a significantly greater issue in full-time undergraduate admissions than for part-time or postgraduate admissions.
- There was a lack of national or competitor/comparator data to benchmark against.
- There was variation in time limits applicants had to submit a complaint/appeal.
- Some admissions staff were concerned over consistency in handling a complaint/appeal received centrally or in devolved areas of the institution.
- Common areas of complaint/appeal were shown as:
  - confirmation decisions
  - interview outcomes
  - quality of feedback, particularly on portfolio submissions

While dissatisfaction with the outcome of an application may be the main motivation in making a complaint or appeal, there are no definitive figures on how many are made or how many decisions are changed as a result. The true volume of applicant complaints and appeals nationally is unknown and the variation in practice across HE providers makes any cumulative count of recorded numbers meaningless. Few cases result in legal proceedings, suggesting that providers' internal processes are largely satisfactory or that they are settled out of court.

However, it may also be that litigation is too complicated, costly and lengthy to be a worthwhile route of redress in most cases within the admissions process. Quick and supportive internal redress would usually be in everyone's interests, but providers should be aware of the potential for external recourse.

## 3. Definitions

Specific definitions of an applicant complaint or appeal vary across the sector. Some providers do not distinguish between the two terms. Some cover applicants under their student complaints and appeals policies. HE providers will need to address applicant complaints and appeals in their published policies to be compliant with [the Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\) advice to HE](#).

(March 2015). This stressed the need for HE providers to ensure their complaint handling procedures and practices are easy to locate, accessible, clear and fair to applicants and students. It would be rare for an applicant to be in dispute with more than one institution, but such variation in terminology and usage cannot be helpful to applicants, or those advising them, and does not promote transparency.

The following definitions are based on those previously developed by SPA and approved by the HE sector led Delivery Partnership<sup>3</sup>. HE providers may need to wish to expand on these definitions but they should provide a basic and common understanding of the two terms:

- 1) A **complaint** is a specific concern related to a procedural error, irregularity or maladministration in the admissions procedures or policies.
- 2) An **appeal** is a request for a formal review of an admissions decision or the wording/ terms/ conditions of an offer.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for England and Wales (OIA), while not handling applicant complaints, does have a helpful definition: a complaint is about an act or omission of a Member HE Provider (whether or not arising from a consumer contract). Within the OIA's [\*Good practice framework for handling complaints and academic appeals \(2014\)\*](#) a student complaint is defined as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about a university's [or other HE provider] action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the university [or HE provider].”

The OIA states that a student may bring a complaint about an act or omission of a Member HE Provider **or another provider** (whether or not the other provider is a Member HE Provider) where the course of study, or programme of research, leads to the grant of one of the Member HE Provider's awards.

In Scotland HE providers are required to use the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman ([\*SPSO Valuing Complaints Scottish Higher Education Model Complaint Handling Procedures\*](#)) which have a similar definition to the OIA.

HE providers should be clear in their definition of a complaint or appeal for applicants, as well as for their own staff, while acknowledging that any definition of a complaint is very broad.

Some HE providers that stipulate no right of appeal do still permit applicants to complain that a decision was wrong due to mishandling of the process. This is likely to add confusion and uncertainty, and may deter an applicant from lodging a legitimate complaint. Any formal investigation into a complaint about a decision would normally involve a review of that decision, if only to check it is in line with procedures. This is in effect an appeal that is devoid of any assurance of corrective or compensatory action, should it be upheld. It would be more transparent and fairer for any request to change an admissions decision or offer to be recorded as an appeal. Providers should still set grounds for consideration and could refuse any request outside of those grounds.

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Delivery Partnership\*](#), 2006-08, chaired by Sir Graeme Davies, then Vice-Chancellor, University of London, was an HE sector-led group that undertook a programme of reform of the applications process to HE. Funded by the Government it was set up after the Government's response to the DfES consultation *Improving the Higher Education Applications Process* 2005. Its recommendations included a series of measures designed to improve the applications process, and in light of these and other changes in HE, to commit to a consideration of further progress towards a 'post qualifications applications' (PQA) system. The latter was considered fully but was not implemented. Membership, representing the four countries of the UK, included Vice-Chancellors and senior HE managers, expert admissions practitioners, representatives from schools/colleges, the FE sector, SPA, UCAS, NUS, Universities UK and GuildHE, Awarding Organisations and others.

## 4. External regulation

### 4.1 Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)

The [Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\) advice](#) to HE providers on consumer law, published in 2015, aims to help HE providers understand their responsibilities in complying with consumer protection legislation when dealing with undergraduate students. SPA's view is that HE providers should consider the implications of this advice for all types of applicants and students, not just undergraduates.

To be transparent and to comply with consumer legislation, providers should ensure applicants who are dissatisfied with any process or procedure are made aware of the HE provider's complaints and appeals procedure and their rights to take the matter further. These rights may vary according to the stage of an application, particularly after a contract is formed when an offer of a place is accepted, so providers should seek clarity from their own legal advisors.

HE providers should consider the CMA advice and ensure they comply. If necessary they should make changes to their practices and policies, including those on complaints and appeals. HE providers might find it helpful to use the CMA advice as part of a more general review of their processes and policies in admissions, to ensure they are up to date and easily found online. Non-compliance with consumer protection regulations/legislation could result in enforcement action by local authority Trading Standards Services (or in Northern Ireland, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment), by CMA itself, or in individual legal action from applicants.

SPA agrees with the CMA statement below, which equally applies to applicants:

“Even though you may endeavour to treat students fairly, it may still be the case that some students are disappointed or dissatisfied with their experience. Poor complaints handling can undermine your relationship with students and mean you incur unnecessary time and expense dealing with grievances that could have been resolved sooner. Investing time in early resolution of a complaint will free up the time of academic and support staff and ultimately contribute to the continued positive experience of students”

The advice is aimed at both [HE providers](#) (see Chapter 6 and checklist summary at Annex A) and [students](#) (see Chapter 4, which details applicants' rights and expectations with regard to complaints and appeals).

The section below summarises key points from Chapter 6 relating to prospective student/applicant complaints, though it is recommended that HE providers refer directly to the [Competition and Markets Authority advice](#) for full details.

The complaints procedure:

- a) Must be easily located and accessible to prospective students, for example on the HE provider's website and intranet (i.e. is publicly available as well as via any applicant portal). If it is not, then this could be a misleading omission under the *Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008* (CPRs).
- b) Must provide prospective students with information about the complaints process in a durable medium<sup>4</sup> before they accept an offer of a place on a course. This is a requirement under the

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<sup>4</sup> A PDF document could meet the requirement of a 'durable medium', as long as the following safeguards are in place: a) the information should be protected, so it cannot be altered (HE providers may wish to consider version control and date stamping); b) the information should be capable of being stored and printed by the applicant/student if they wish; c) the applicant/student should be able to easily identify the information they were provided with i.e. it must be easy to find and be a permanent record of what they were given access to – so must not be unilaterally changed; d) the information has to be easily available for the applicant/student to access for a sufficient period, this would include access for a sufficient period post-completion of the course.]

*Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013* (CCRs). This includes procedures relating to applicants and current students if they are separate.

- c) Must provide prospective students with clear and accurate information about the complaint handling procedures in writing and (where applicable) verbally e.g.:
- Where the HE provider offers a course in partnership with or sponsored or awarded by, another HE provider, it should be clear where responsibility for complaint handling lies.
  - The HE provider must provide accurate details of any external complaint or redress scheme that students can access.
  - Where students raise concerns at an informal level, the HE provider should inform them that they can make a complaint under your formal complaints process if the matter is not satisfactorily resolved. Not doing so may be a breach of the CPRs.

HE providers:

- d) Must ensure the complaints handling processes are fair, which is more likely to be achieved where the HE provider:
- sets out clear and reasonable timescales in which prospective students can expect to hear back about their complaint at each stage of the process, as applicable
  - sets out clear and reasonable timescales relating to how long prospective students will be given to respond to any requests for further information that you may make
  - does not create unreasonable barriers for students pursuing a complaint
  - provides the ability for prospective students to escalate the matter if they are unhappy and, where the regulatory framework allows it, to appeal if it is not satisfactorily resolved

Failure to deal with complaints fairly and reasonably may amount to an unfair practice under the CPRs, may fail to meet the requirements of professional diligence, and could also be a potentially unfair term.

- e) Must follow any guidelines published by any third party redress or complaint schemes of which the HE provider is a member. HE providers may also have other complaint handling obligations under HE-specific rules, such as the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA)*. They may also be members of third party redress or complaint schemes that have published guidelines on complaint handling – for example the OIA in England and Wales (students only) or the SPSO in Scotland (applicants and students). Failing to abide by these obligations and/or guidelines could also be an unfair commercial practice under the CPRs.
- f) Must train staff in and ensure they follow the HEPs complaint handling procedures in practice.

Under consumer law applicants who are not satisfied after exhausting the HE provider's processes could refer initially to local authority Trading Standards Services (or in Northern Ireland, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment) or the CMA itself.

## **4.2 Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)**

Applicants to Scottish HE providers have a right of appeal to the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#) (SPSO) once all internal procedures have been exhausted, even if the matter involves a third party acting on the HE provider's behalf. There is no equivalent recourse for applicants in England, Northern Ireland or Wales. According to the SPSO:

“Universities do interact with the wider public as well as students enrolled in courses and an

individual who wishes to complain retains the right to come to the Ombudsman's office after the University have considered their concerns. Therefore, while it remains within the discretion of the University to decide how to respond to such issues, they are under a statutory duty to inform those who raise concerns that they have the right to pursue them with the Ombudsman.”

*Model Complaints Handling Procedures* (CHPs), one for the Higher Education sector and one for the Further Education sector, have applied to all universities and colleges in Scotland since 2012. Compliance with the CHPs is required and is assessed by the Complaints Standards Authority (CSA), part of the SPSO, and is monitored by the CSA in conjunction with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Data on the number and type of HE complaints referred to the SPSO – identifying the HE provider– are published in the SPSO [statistics webpages](#). The [Valuing Complaints webpages](#) have details of the procedures for CHPs for HE and FE providers in Scotland.

### **4.3 Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) – England and Wales**

The main purpose of the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\) Scheme](#) is the independent, impartial and transparent review of unresolved complaints by students about acts and omissions of Member HE Providers and, through learning from complaints, the promotion of good practice. The (OIA) only considers students’ complaints in England and Wales, not applicants’, but its viewpoint on academic judgement is an influential one, their [glossary](#) states:

“Academic judgment is a judgment that is made about a matter where only the opinion of an academic expert is sufficient. The Higher Education Act 2004 specifically states that we [the OIA] cannot look at academic judgment...”

“The following areas do not involve academic judgment: decisions about the fairness of procedures, whether they have been correctly interpreted, what the facts are, how a provider has communicated with the student, whether an opinion has been expressed outside the area of an academic's competence, the way the evidence has been considered, whether there is evidence of bias or maladministration.”

In the [OIA Guidance Note: Eligibility and the Rules](#) (July 2015) rule 3.1 states:

“We cannot consider a complaint from a prospective student whose application for study is rejected or badly handled. Such a prospective student would also be precluded from complaining to the OIA because they were not a registered student at the Member HE Provider. However, we will normally consider a complaint if a student, having registered at the Member HE Provider, is required to leave because of some irregularity in his/her application for admission. We may also consider complaints from registered students which relate to the information given by Member HE Providers to prospective students prior to admission.

“We will not normally consider complaints from a former student who has either withdrawn from a programme of study or has been required to leave and who subsequently reapplies for admission to the Member HE Provider. If a student is already at a Member HE Provider but is applying to join another course or to transfer to PhD status, we will look at the provider’s procedures to decide whether the complaint is an admission issue.”

In December 2014 the OIA issued its [Good practice framework for handling complaints and academic appeals](#). This provides an overview of the key factors to include in effective complaints and academic appeals processes. It sets out underlying principles and operational guidance to support institutions in areas including timeframes, progression between informal, formal and review stages, and record-keeping. When dealing with an applicant complaint of appeal, HE providers should bear in mind that timescales for applicants are driven by the admissions cycle. HE providers need to be

timely in their response and handling of the complaint or appeal to ensure applicants, wherever possible, can meet the requirements of the application process, whether it be via UCAS or a direct application.

The OIA framework followed a consultation with HE providers, students' unions and higher education and complaints handling organisations and will be used in considering complaints and appeals from students from 2015-16.

SPA suggests HE providers consider the principles and processes outlined in this comprehensive framework with regard to transferable or adaptable good practice for their admissions complaints and appeals process.

HE providers may find it useful to look through [cases of complaints under consumer protection and other issues](#) (May 2015) that the OIA have handled with regards to students for examples that may also be useful for updating policy and procedure in admissions.

It is also worth noting that the *Consumer Rights Act 2015* has amended the Higher Education Act 2004 to extend the definition of "qualifying institutions" to include providers offering higher education courses that are designated for student support funding, and providers with degree awarding powers. This includes further education colleges, alternative providers and School Centred Initial Teacher Training providers (SCITTS) providing HE. All students on higher education courses within these providers will have recourse to the OIA Scheme, not just those on courses which have been designated for student support funding.

#### 4.4 The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) with the higher education community, sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet. [Chapter B2: Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education](#) (2013) focuses on the interconnected policies and procedures related to the recruitment, selection and admission of students to higher education. It offers a framework for assuring quality, and provides guidance to HE providers. The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about recruitment, selection and admission to HE:

"Recruitment, selection, and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme."

Chapter B2 contains ten Indicators of sound practice to help HE providers reflect on how they might meet the Expectation; the following three Indicators are particularly pertinent to complaints and appeals in admissions:

**Indicator 2:** Recruitment, selection and admission processes are conducted in a professional manner by authorised and competent representatives of the higher education provider.

**Indicator 3:** Higher education providers have procedures for handling appeals and complaints about recruitment, selection and admission that are fair and accessible. Appeals and complaints procedures are conducted expeditiously and in accordance with a published timescale.

**Indicator 4:** Higher education providers monitor, review and update their recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures, in order to enhance them and to ensure that they continue to support the provider's mission and strategic objectives. Higher education providers determine the frequency with which monitoring and review are undertaken.

Student complaints and appeals are dealt with under [Chapter B9: Academic appeals and Student Complaints](#) (2013).

## 5. Legislation, other regulation and cases referred to court

The CMA advice for HE providers focused on compliance with the following consumer protection legislation:

- *Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008* (CPR)
- *Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013* (CCR)
- *Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999* (UTCCR) and from October 2015
- *Consumer Rights Act 2015*

There are of course a number of laws to which applicants could have recourse, including the [Data Protection Act 1998](#) and [Equality Act 2010](#) among others. SPA recommends that HE providers in any doubt consult their own legal advisors for information and advice with regard to applicant complaints and appeals. SPA cannot provide legal advice.

All applicants to a registered HE provider in the UK have the right of redress in the courts if there are reasonable grounds to suspect a breach of the law.

In cases referred to court by the CMA, Trading Standards, other authority or individuals, a magistrate would normally expect all internal procedures to have been exhausted first. Therefore, providers should ensure they have clear, accessible policies detailing the different stages for complaint and appeal and the mechanisms in place to demonstrate whether or not an individual has followed them.

The courts will not try a case disputing academic judgement, but what constitutes academic judgement within admissions decisions may be open to interpretation. For example, it may be felt that an HE provider's decision has been based more on the forces impacting them within the competitive market place – rather than on the academic demands of study or other non-academic requirements. It is therefore essential to define academic judgement in the context of admissions within the HE provider's admissions policy and clarify any ambiguity.

## 6. Framework and SPA recommendations for HE provider's applicants complaints and appeals policy

Following the consideration of evidence from the SPA survey of HE providers and having discussed issues with regulators, the OIA and other organisations, SPA recommends HE providers:

- Define and distinguish between complaints and appeals.
- Have policies on both complaints and appeals **specific to applicants**.
- Make the policies transparent, intelligible, easy to find and readily available to all.
- Ensure all staff and others acting on behalf of the HE provider are aware of, are competent in, and adhere to procedures, regardless of where a complaint or dispute is first raised.
- Monitor and review their complaints and appeals policies and procedures, in order to enhance good practice and ensure they are fit for purpose, and that they comply with consumer and other legislation/ regulation.

A good starting point for designing a new policy or reviewing an existing one, in addition to the external policy and regulatory requirements, is to reference your student complaints and appeals policy. There is specific legislation governing student complaints, greater external scrutiny and

usually a strong commitment to supporting the student experience, which make student complaints and appeals policies robust and rich sources of transferable principles. Some providers choose to incorporate admissions under their student complaints and appeals policies, rather than in a separate policy. Such student complaints and appeals policies should:

- Make specific mention to its coverage of applicants or potential students.
- Identify aspects that do not apply to applicants (e.g. recourse to the OIA for England and Wales).
- Clarify any areas of potential ambiguity (e.g. reference to complaints and appeals against examinations relates to the institution's own examinations, not externally-awarded ones sat by applicants).
- Include types of complaint or appeal specific to pre-entry to HE.
- Be referenced in the admissions policy and be readily accessible on the main website (not only on an applicant intranet/portal).

HE providers will find it useful to consider [the QAA Quality Code \(2011\) - Chapter B9: Complaints and Appeals](#) and the [OIA's good practice framework](#) when updating their admissions complaints and appeals policies and procedures. Fair admissions and support for applicants should be deciding factors when considering whether or not points from the QAA, OIA and your own student complaints and appeals policy should also be applied to applicants (whether in totality or in part). HE providers should be able to justify why any internal aspects of handling complaints and appeals from students would not be right for applicants, e.g. resourcing and timing may prove practical barriers within the admissions cycle. An institution's duty towards students carries a different legal status than towards applicants and the payment of fees may carry higher service expectations that cannot be extended to applicants. However, this should never be an automatic assumption, so each aspect should be judged on its own merits in line with the institution's mission, strategy and admissions policy.

## **7. Considerations for HE providers for their applicant complaints and appeals policy**

The following considerations have been derived from a review of over 40 applicant complaints and appeals policies, transferable good practice from student complaints and appeals and discussion with practitioners. What to include in or exclude from a policy will vary, particularly on grounds for consideration, but SPA recommends HE providers should clearly state their stance on the following common areas (a summary checklist is available in **Appendix A**):

### **7.1 General principles**

Most issues can be resolved without the applicant having to make a formal complaint. If, for example, an applicant or prospective student is unhappy with the process or information provided at an open day or HE fair, it is important that they let the HE provider know to enable them to have the chance to put things right. The applicant can raise the matter informally (e.g. by phone, email, at a visit day, after an interview) and the issue can be discussed, and hopefully, a satisfactory resolution agreed.

Where prospective students or applicants raise concerns at an informal level the HE provider should inform the applicant or their representative that they can make a complaint under the formal complaints process if the matter is not satisfactorily resolved.

Formal complaints or appeals are rarely raised on a whim and applicants resorting to the policy will most likely be experiencing uncertainty and anxiety. A general statement of principles is one way to ease potential distress and reassure those with genuine concerns.

These principles should include your commitment to consistent, fair and professional practice in order to safeguard applicants' interests. There should be links to any related policies (e.g. admissions, equality) and any external reference used (e.g. QAA; SPA, CMA, SPSO) to affirm the quality and

rigour given to handling applicant complaints or appeals. A statement that most complaints are successfully resolved informally will send a positive message, and may redirect any applicants who may be unaware of alternative resolution routes. There should be reassurance that submission of a complaint or appeal will not prejudice any opinion of the applicant by the HE provider, or be used to adversely affect any later dealings with the applicant (including any new applications made in future years).

## 7.2 Coverage

The policy should clearly state who it applies to. For simplicity and to avoid confusion, a single policy covering all applicants to the institution would be advisable. Any contact details/references within the policy will need to account for variation.

In some cases, particularly where there are significant procedural or technical differences, an HE provider may decide to have dedicated policies for specific applicant groups. Different groups to consider include:

- enquirers and those in the process of filling-in/submitting an application
- different levels of study (e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate)
- different modes of study (e.g. full-time, part-time)
- courses where aspects of the decision-making are the responsibility of non-staff members (e.g. interviews for some professional courses; decisions made by staff at a partner HE provider)

There should always be an appropriate route for redress and it should be noted that an HE provider is ultimately responsible (and liable) for the admission of its students. If this responsibility is deferred to third parties, the HE provider should satisfy itself that the third party has appropriate dispute resolution policies and these should be publicised in the same way as the HE provider would.

HE providers should consider their relationship with any partner or collaborative providers to ensure it is understood and clear to all parties, including the applicants, where and how the applicant should raise any complaint and appeal. HE providers in England will wish to consider the [HEFCE Circular 18/2015: Institutions' responsibilities in partnership arrangements](#) published in July 2015. This reinforces the message by stating:

“Where courses are offered through partnerships between HE providers, it is important that the providers and their students are clear (from the application process onwards) where responsibilities lie.”

## 7.3 Grounds for consideration

The policy must clearly set out all grounds for consideration of any complaint or appeal, or if simpler, any exclusions from consideration. Care should be taken not to include any grounds that would be frivolous (i.e. that bear no relation to the handling of an application or quality of service) as this could result in diverting disproportionate resources. Avoid excluding any grounds where a genuine mistake may have occurred, as these should normally be able to be dealt with outside any complaint or appeal process. See the [SPA Guide to managing mistakes in admissions decision making](#), developed by the SPA National Expert Think Tank (NETT) (2014) for more information.

Policies stating that disagreements against academic judgement do not constitute grounds for appeal should clearly define exactly what falls under academic judgement. This is particularly important in any aspect of admissions where it could be challenged that only the opinion of an academic expert would suffice.

Providers should also decide in what circumstances to consider information not originally supplied. This may be information not originally included on the application (e.g. missing qualifications) or new information, not known at the point the application was submitted (e.g. dyslexia diagnosis).

#### **7.4 Representation**

As with other aspects of admissions, many providers expect any complaint or appeal to be submitted by the applicant(s) concerned and may not consider third party or anonymous submissions. Concerning third party representation, some consideration should be given to ensure there is no potential discrimination or legal issue, particularly in regard to applicants who are minors or with a disability.

An applicant wishing to lodge a complaint or appeal in person may wish to be accompanied and it may be deemed insensitive to refuse. It would be fair to stipulate ground rules for such 'guests' within the policy (at the very least it should be clear that any guest is aware not to do anything that may prejudice the applicant's case).

Whether or not third party submissions are accepted, the applicant should always be encouraged to discuss the matter with peers, parents, advisors or teachers. Separate advice before and during any dispute will help an applicant reach an informed opinion.

On rare occasions the HE provider may receive an anonymous complaint or accusation. It would be difficult to investigate fairly without the knowledge or consent of those involved. However, before completely excluding any such investigation, the HE provider should decide whether or not this would always be the case. There may be times when following up such an anonymous complaint could be justifiable. If there are any exceptions (e.g. anonymous accusation of an applicant's fraud) they should be stipulated to avoid any later claims that the HE provider has breached its own policy.

If the HE provider decides to consider any complaint or appeal not initiated by the applicant concerned, that applicant must be made fully aware of the case and given the opportunity of self-representation. It should not be assumed the applicant already knows about the dispute.

Most staff handling applicant complaints or appeals are unlikely to be legal experts. If an applicant wishes to be represented by a solicitor, the HE provider should involve its own legal representation and not conduct such discussions as part of the standard policy. A provider should expect and encourage applicants to exhaust all the channels of redress stated in the policy before resorting to legal representation. Refusal to do so may be to the applicant's detriment should the case ever be considered in court.

#### **7.5 Procedure**

HE providers will need to adhere strictly to their own procedures and should clearly set these out, using plain language as much as possible. This will undoubtedly require applicants to follow certain procedures (e.g. following set stages in making a complaint or appeal; completing a submission form). It would be unfair to reject a case or exclude pertinent information solely because of a minor procedural mistake on the applicant's part; it is important to remain reasonable throughout. This would demonstrate the institution's willingness to support the applicant and help ensure that the procedure itself does not become a barrier to amicable resolution.

#### **7.6 Deadlines**

Both HE provider and applicant will have reasonable expectations of when to hear from the other. If deadlines are set too early, an applicant may not have time to realise there is an issue or investigate what steps to take. If left too long it may become practically impossible to investigate a case or to make any useful judgement. It must therefore be clear how long applicants have to submit a dispute and how long they have to respond to any institution correspondence, including requests for further

documentation.

Several policies use 28 days after the occurrence (e.g. decision; interview; open day) as a standard timeframe in which to lodge a dispute and this would seem reasonable. However, individual HE provider's practices may necessitate a shorter deadline or facilitate a longer one. It may even be that relevant deadline changes are dependent on the stage of the application or point in the admissions cycle (e.g. there may not be as much time to investigate queries or complaints in Clearing).

In setting deadlines for applicants, providers should take into account any external deadlines, e.g. through UCAS, UCAS Teacher Training (UTT), UCAS Conservatoires, UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI), and Student Loans Company (SLC), that may pose a barrier to any appropriate resolution. Consideration should also be given to any holidays, examinations or other periods when an applicant may not have normal access to an advisor. Deadlines should be made clear and readily accessible; lack of information about the deadlines themselves may be cause for dispute. Providers should also provide for exceptions or extenuating circumstances and define who has authority to judge whether or not any submission after a given deadline should be considered. Applicants may not always be aware of a problem until much later (e.g. a poorly worded offer may not become apparent until Confirmation) and UCAS may well consider rectifying a genuine mistake after one of its own deadlines has passed if it is in the interest of all concerned.

The policy should also state when an applicant should expect a response to any complaint or query. Again, this may vary according to the point in the admissions cycle and any significant delays could have detrimental consequences, so a timely response is advised. Seven to ten days would appear to be reasonable, although some providers may have performance indicators or service level agreements requiring a quicker turnaround. If the dispute cannot be resolved promptly, an acknowledgment should be sent by the deadline set. The acknowledgement should explain the steps to be taken, how long the process is expected to take and any further information required. No dispute should overrun or remain unresolved though lack of correspondence on the part of the institution.

## **7.7 Feedback**

Providing feedback to applicants on decisions made will ensure the applicant understands the reasoning behind the decision before deciding whether or not to challenge it. The policy should therefore include details of how to obtain feedback, or more detailed feedback if the institution automatically includes feedback with an unsuccessful decision. Further guidance on feedback to applicants is available in the [SPA Good practice in feedback to unsuccessful applicants](#) (2012).

## **7.8 Informal stage**

The first stage for lodging any dispute should be handled informally with the member of staff directly concerned. It is likely that many admissions disputes are resolved amicably in this way. However, it should be cited in policy, so that staff can be reassured it is a legitimate route, applicants are aware of the option, and all parties are sure of the next steps should the issue persist. The option to discuss the dispute informally with a staff expert less directly involved (e.g. Head of Admissions) should also be given, in case the dispute is against an individual, in case the applicant would be uncomfortable discussing it with the person directly concerned, or in case there is no readily identifiable individual to address it.

All applicants lodging a dispute informally should be directed to the institution's policy, so that they are aware of their entitlement to take the dispute further should they wish and cannot accuse the institution of obscuring or delaying their case. The informal stage should be encouraged, but it would be inappropriate to make it a compulsory stage. Any applicant who feels aggrieved enough should be entitled to lodge a dispute more formally as soon as they wish to. Similarly, any member of staff

dealing with an informal dispute should recommend the applicant proceed to a formal stage if a satisfactory resolution cannot be agreed or if the staff member in any way feels it would be unprofessional to continue informally (e.g. if there is accusation of discrimination against a protected characteristic under the *Equality Act 2010*).

A brief record of any informal dispute should be kept by the member of staff involved, in case it is brought up in any later formal dispute. It is not essential to keep these centrally, although it may prove beneficial for a basic log to be kept and reported to a relevant central committee each year. Any trends may indicate a simple improvement that can be made to reduce such issues in future (e.g. new wording in feedback; specific advice to teachers and advisors) and, particularly in devolved admissions structures, may provide reassurance to staff that they are not alone in the issues they deal with.

Providers may wish to offer mediation services as an alternative to progressing a dispute on to a formal stage, or to progress alongside any formal stage that is otherwise likely to take a long time to resolve. Mediation services have become more common in student complaints and further information is available through the [Improving Dispute Resolution Advisory Service for Further and Higher Education](#) (IDRAS). There is also the [European Union Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution](#) (ADR) that came into effect in July 2015. This applies to disputes arising from consumer contracts, and covers complaints by students and applicants about higher education providers. The OIA is designated as the ADR entity for students in higher education in England and Wales. Complaints that are not covered by an ADR entity (i.e. including from applicants) should, under the Directive, be picked up by a 'residual body' but the UK Government has not (yet at time of writing October 2015) set one up. The ADR is a means of settling disputes without using the court system. It therefore involves lower costs, making dispute resolution more accessible.

Further advice for applicants can also be provided by [Citizens Advice \(England, Wales and Scotland\)](#) consumer helpline on 03454 04 05 06 or [Consumerline \(Northern Ireland\)](#) on 0300 123 6262. These consumer helplines are staffed by trained consumer advice advisors. They will be able to advise applicants whether a HE provider appears to have met their legal obligations or not. They can also give advice about an applicant's particular issue and possible remedies. The Citizens Advice consumer service can also help applicants report a problem to Trading Standards.

## 7.9 Formal stage

All applicants dissatisfied with attempts to resolve a dispute informally should be given the option to pursue it formally. The policy should explain how to proceed with a formal complaint or appeal and state what information is required. This should include: personal details and application number; details of the dispute; any relevant prior correspondence; an agreement for the recipient to disclose relevant information in pursuit of the investigation; and possibly an indication of any specific outcome sought. It may be useful to design a submission form to ensure all relevant information and disclaimers are provided (see **Appendix B** for an example template form).

Complaints should not be formally considered by anyone directly implicated in the case. Appeals should not be formally considered and decided upon by anyone involved in the original decision in question. These individuals should be asked to provide statement and the risk of perceived bias would be too great if they were also involved in making the formal decision. There is always the risk the person responsible may also be directly involved in any individual case (particularly if it is the Head of Admissions). An alternative investigator should be nominated and should be ready to handle any case the primary investigator cannot. This may be a senior administrator/manager from a field not directly involved in admissions operations, such as the Academic Registrar, Director of Student Experience or a nominee from the institution's Quality Assurance Office.

A panel of adjudicators would broaden the expertise available to consider a case and would go even

further to reducing perceptions of bias. This may be particularly important for cases where the dispute concerns issues beyond purely procedural ones (e.g. equality; student welfare; finance; medical). An institution may wish to include student representation on such a panel, although not if the same student representative body (e.g. NUS) would also be involved in supporting and advising the applicant concerned.

If it is decided there are grounds to consider the dispute, the applicant should be given the opportunity to speak to the investigating officer or adjudicating panel in person, although he/she should in no way feel obliged or pressured to do so.

### **7.10 Outcomes**

When a decision has been reached it should be communicated to the applicant, along with the reasons behind the decision, any actions or changes to be made and information on any further stages should the applicant be dissatisfied with the outcome. If an appeal against a decision has found in favour of the applicant, every effort should be made to reverse and rectify the error. The HE provider must accept liability for any mistakes on its part and ensure that the applicant does not suffer for those mistakes.

In matters where the appeal is upheld but the institution was not liable (e.g. re-mark from an external examination board; new information not available when the original decision was made) the applicant should be helped wherever possible. If it is not possible to reverse a decision (e.g. places have been filled) suitable alternatives should be offered. This may include a deferred place for the following year, a different suitable course or arrangements with a different institution. If no suitable alternatives can be agreed, and dependent on the institution's level of liability, compensation should be considered.

### **7.11 Termination**

The policy should clearly identify the point at which an outcome is final and there are no further stages of redress. Too many stages can cause a dispute to become overly burdensome, intimidating and slow. HE providers may wish to offer a review stage after the formal stage, only if there is new evidence to consider or grounds for complaint in the handling of the formal stage. Scottish providers must refer to the applicant's right to contact the SPSO once all internal stages have terminated.

### **7.12 Contact details**

Full contact details for those involved in considering complaints and appeals should be listed in the policy. This should include contacts for any additional advice or support (e.g. counselling) during the dispute.

### **7.13 Checklist**

If the policy is particularly long or detailed, it may help to include a checklist or summary flowchart indicating the key points, timetable and contacts for the different stages.

### **7.14 Recording and Monitoring**

A record of an individual case should be kept for as long as a dispute may persist. In general terms the full case file should not be needed beyond the end of the admissions cycle concerned. It should not be used to form part of a student's record. Providers should refer to their own data protection procedures in the handling and destruction of such personal information.

The primary investigating officer, or other nominee, should be responsible for keeping records on the number, type and outcomes of complaints and appeals. These should be reported to a relevant committee or senior management team with responsibility for an annual review, to ensure any outcomes were delivered, any procedural or policy changes are implemented and any specific trends

are identified. The institution may wish to consider making such numerical records of complaints and appeals available on their website, so long as no individuals can be identified from those figures (there may be particular sensitivity around courses with small cohorts).

## 7.15 Training

Clearly stating arrangements for making staff aware of their obligations under the policy and highlighting training in any specific responsibilities will reassure applicants and staff of the HE provider's commitment to handling complaints and appeals professionally. A dispute may be raised with various staff through different channels, not just through a central admissions contact. Increased awareness and specific training will help ensure consistent enactment of the policy and make practice more robust to legal challenge. Indeed the CMA advice to HE providers states HE providers must ensure that their staff are trained in and follow the HE providers' complaint handling procedures in practice.

## 8. HE provider policy examples

The following examples are from some of the HE providers with publicly-available applicant complaints and appeals policies on their websites. All clearly define the difference between complaints and appeals and all include detailed information on policy enactment. Their inclusion in this statement does not necessarily mean that SPA endorses the content and individual discretion is highly advised in deciding what elements, if any, to incorporate within your own policies. These policies were accessed in September 2015:

- Anglia Ruskin University [Undergraduate](#) (2012)
- [Cardiff University](#) (2012)
- [Edinburgh Napier University](#) (2014)
- Newcastle University [Undergraduate](#) (2015) [Postgraduate](#) (2014)
- [University of Cumbria](#) (2015)
- [University of Liverpool](#) (2015)
- [The University of Sheffield](#) (2012 but reviewed annually)
- [University of Sunderland](#) 2014-15 (Appendix B of Admissions Policy)

## 9. Sources of more information for HE providers (*this list is not exhaustive*):

- [Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\) advice to HE](#) (March 2015) aimed at helping HE providers comply with their obligations under consumer protection law
- [Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\) HE Undergraduate students: your rights under consumer law](#) (March 2015)
- HEFCE Circular 18/2015: [Institutions' responsibilities in partnership arrangements](#) (July 2015)
- [Improving Dispute Resolution Advisory Service for Further and Higher Education](#) (IDRAS)
- Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) [Good practice framework for handling complaints and academic appeals](#) (2014)
- [SPA Good practice in feedback to unsuccessful applicants](#) (2012)
- [SPA Guide to managing mistakes in admissions decision making](#), developed by the SPA National Expert Think Tank (NETT) (2014)
- [SPSO Valuing Complaints Scottish Higher Education Model Complaint Handling Procedures](#)
- UK Quality Code [Chapter B2: Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education](#) QAA (2013)

- UK Quality Code [Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints](#) QAA (2013).

SPA Version 2, October 2015



## Appendix A:

October 2015

## Checklist: Summary applicant complaints and appeals policy

This checklist provides issues to consider, either within a separate applicant complaints and appeals policy, or as a section within an overarching admissions policy, or embedded within a student complaints and appeals policy. It is not necessary to include every aspect listed, but HE providers need to be clear about why something is not included. The list is not intended to be wholly exhaustive and providers should include any other aspects they feel would be supportive, particularly in reference to any uncommon or institution-specific admissions practices.

<input type="checkbox"/>	An opening statement, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> general statement of principles</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> dedication to consistent, fair and professional practice in order to safeguard applicants' interests</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> links to any related policies (e.g. admissions; equality)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reference to any external sources used (e.g. QAA; SPA; CMA HE advice)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> statement that most disputes are successfully resolved informally</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reassurance that there will be no discrimination/prejudice as a result of submitting a complaint or appeal</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clear definitions of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> complaint</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> appeal</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	A statement of the types of applicant covered by or excluded from the policy
<input type="checkbox"/>	The grounds for considering a complaint or appeal request
<input type="checkbox"/>	Who may submit a complaint or appeal and who may represent the applicant
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearly set procedures in plain language that are easy to follow
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deadline for submitting a complaint or appeal (e.g. 28 days after incident) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any variations/exceptions to the standard deadline</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Named individual/post for considering exceptions</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deadline for receiving a response to any submission (e.g. 5 days after submission) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledgement of submission with further timelines and steps to be taken</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encouragement for applicant to seek feedback on an admissions decision before lodging an appeal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Details and contact information on how to obtain feedback</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed information on the informal stage, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identified contacts directly concerned with issue</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Alternative contact (e.g. Head of Admissions)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Notification that the informal stage is advised but not compulsory</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clarity on right to progress to formal stage if dissatisfied or if staff contact is unable to resolve the dispute</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Notice of any record kept</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Possibility of mediation services</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Detailed information on the formal stage, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of how to proceed and what information is required</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Method for submitting additional documentation, evidence or testimony</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Method for obtaining consent to share applicant's information in the course of investigation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Submission form or separate clear checklist of required information and declaration/disclaimer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identified primary contact for considering grounds to investigate and an alternative contact</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identified primary contact for investigating an eligible dispute and an alternative contact</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any additional panellists/adjudicators and their specific responsibilities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any option, but not obligation, for applicant to speak with adjudicators</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Explanation of how outcomes will be reached and communicated to applicant, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reasons behind decision reached</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Commitment to reverse a decision wherever possible in cases finding in favour of the appellant</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Details of likely alternative solutions should reversal prove impossible</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Possible inclusion of a further review stage for unsuccessful outcomes, setting out the grounds for eligibility (e.g. new evidence; procedural mishandling of case)</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Specific identification of the point at which no further continuance of a complaint or appeal would be considered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Details of SPSO for Scottish providers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recourse to advice e.g. <a href="#">Citizens Advice (England, Wales and Scotland)</a> consumer helpline on 03454 04 05 06 or <a href="#">Consumerline (Northern Ireland)</a> on 0300 123 6262.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recourse to other sources e.g. dispute resolution services, legal advice, Trading Standards Services (or in Northern Ireland, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment), CMA</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Contact details at relevant points in the policy and listed at end</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide contacts for advice and support during complaint/dispute</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Summary checklist for applicants, showing key points for each stage, timetable and contacts</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Statement on the handling, recording and destruction of information gathered by the institution as part of the complaint or appeal investigation</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Statement concerning any monitoring or review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Possible link to any publicly available data</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Affirmation of staff awareness and understanding of the policy and rigour of training related complaints and appeals and consumer protection awareness issues and any specific responsibilities</p>



**Appendix B: Example template applicant complaints and appeals form**

October 2015

This form is only for the purpose of submitting a formal complaint or appeal in accordance with the **University's/College's** Applicant Complaints and Appeals Policy [<link to website>](#). Please read this policy before submitting the form as we may be unable to consider an inappropriate or incomplete submission.

If you have any queries concerning the completion or submission of this form, please contact the **Head of Admissions/ relevant contact** [<link to e-mail or other contact details>](#).

Surname	
First name(s)	
UCAS Personal ID: <i>(if appropriate)</i>	

Contact details (if different to those on the application or if an application has not been sent yet)

e-mail	
Mobile phone	
Telephone (daytime)	
Address and post code	

Please tick one only

I wish to complain about a procedural error, irregularity or maladministration in the admissions procedures or policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>or</b>	
I wish to appeal against a decision made on my application	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please provide details of your complaint or appeal below  
*(continue on separate sheets if necessary)*

Are you attaching any additional documentation?	Y/N
If yes, please list	
Have you already discussed your complaint or appeal informally with a member of <b>University/ College</b> staff?	Y/N
If yes, please provide details <i>(continue on separate sheets if necessary)</i>	

If you have any specific resolution in mind, please indicate your desired outcome(s) below. Please note any expression of preferred outcome will not prejudice our consideration of your complaint or appeal.

*(continue on separate sheets if necessary)*

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**Declaration:**

I confirm that the above details and any attached documentation is a true reflection of events to the best of my knowledge and that it does not contain any false or fraudulent information. I agree to the investigating officer on behalf of the **University/College** sharing details of this case, including information from my application, with other persons as part of any investigation and to retain a record of that investigation, in accordance with the **University's/College's** Applicant Complaints and Appeals Policy.

signed		date	
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Please send this form and any additional documentation to:

<name, title and contact details>

You should normally expect a response within **7 days** of sending this form, although this may take longer over some holiday periods. If you have not received a response within a reasonable time, please contact the above person for an update.