

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

QUALITY OF ASSURANCE



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**525 YEARS**  
1495 – 2020

# Mapping Against the UK Quality Code

SECTION 3: CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS & APPEALS

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# SECTION 3: CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS & APPEALS

## INTRODUCTION

The Quality Code is split into 12 themes, available online on the QAA website at <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>. As part of this, *Concerns, Complaints & Appeals* are integral to the improvement and feedback mechanisms for any higher education institution. The Code describes this section as follows:

*This Theme gives guidance on concerns, complaints and appeals and how the ability of, and processes for, someone to raise their dissatisfaction promotes equality of opportunity and the rights of all students to benefit from a high-quality academic experience, and to access the support they need to succeed. Providers are encouraged to consider concerns, complaints and appeals as an open opportunity to address and enhance their provision, learning opportunities, public information and management of the information held within their institution.*

*Concerns, Complaints & Appeals* ensures that there are robust processes in place to support those who may feel that the University could improve in specific areas, or that the University has not dealt with an issue appropriately. These mechanisms are central to the betterment and maintenance of high standards in both our academic and wider University environments. Where concerns, complaints and appeals are received, the University works quickly and effectively to ensure that these are dealt with appropriately.

In defining key terms that will be used frequently in this section, the Quality Code notes the following:

**Concern:** Where a student makes comment (in conversation, writing or via social media) on the provision of learning opportunities made available, or for any service that the provider may offer. When raised by a student this is often the starting point for what may become a complaint if left unaddressed.

**Complaint:** A specific query about an aspect of experience of the provider. This guidance focuses on complaints about the quality of a student's learning opportunities, although the principles can be applied to almost all complaints.

**Appeal:** A request for a review of a decision of an academic body around a mark, outcome or decision. Students may appeal an outcome on the basis of evidence or procedure, but not on the basis of disagreement with academic judgement.

## SECTION 3: CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS & APPEALS

The Quality Code has three different sections: the expectations for standards; the expectations for quality; and the guiding principles. The relevant expectations for standards and quality are detailed below. The guiding principles are mapped to the University’s own policies, procedures and quality mechanisms. There are two separate sections for the University’s practices. These provide details on: what the University does and has in place to support that expectation/principle; and the supporting documentation, which includes reference to relevant policy, procedure, website or other documents.

EXPECTATIONS FOR QUALITY & CORE/Common PRACTICES
Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student’s achievement to be reliably assessed.
From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from Higher Education.
The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.
The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

QUALITY CODE PRINCIPLES	UNIVERSITY PRACTICES	SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION
<b>GUIDING PRINCIPLES</b>		
<p>1. Concerns, complaints and appeals are used to improve the student experience.</p> <p>Providers improve the student experience systematically by learning from their processes, and other bodies’ decisions and guidance, sharing this learning where appropriate.</p>	<p><a href="#">The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload.</a></p> <p>Our policies and procedures for appeals and complaints (see supporting documentation) encourage feedback from our student population to ensure a high-quality student and academic experience taking account of both the academic environment and the support services that students may engage with. The feedback provided, by means of appeals and complaints procedures, or through other means, is used to highlight areas of improvement or concern which we can then address, and to ensure high-quality service delivery.</p>	<p><a href="#">Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Webpage)</a></p>

	<p>The University reports annually on academic appeals and bi-annually on complaints data. Our data is analysed by School, level and mode of study. The reports are submitted to the Senior Management Team, Quality Assurance Committee, University Education Committee, Senate and Court for consideration and allow the University to monitor the numbers and nature of the submissions, the actions taken to address any trends that are identified, as well as ensuring oversight of the implementation of policies. As noted, these data are used to identify areas of concern and areas for action which aim to improve the student and academic experience. <a href="#">Complaints data is available on the University's Appeals and Complaints webpages for the most recent academic year compared with previous years.</a></p>	
<p>2. Concerns, complaints and appeals procedures are accessible and inclusive. Procedures are clear, accessible, inclusive, flexible and reviewed regularly.</p>	<p><a href="#">The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload.</a></p> <p>The University's Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals, including <del>Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and</del> a glossary of terms, are on the University webpages, and are accessible to all (see Supporting Documentation). The Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) is also available on the web (see Supporting Documentation). The steps laid out in the procedures aim to ensure clarity of understanding for all stakeholders, as well as their consistent application. <a href="#">The University's Appeals and Complaints webpages set out the steps to be followed in the submission of an appeal and/or complaint.</a> The policies and procedures are inclusive and allow all students, staff, alumni, prospective students and members of the public to raise concerns where appropriate.</p> <p>Where the policies cannot be accessed on the web by any individual, the University is able to provide hard-copy versions of the documents on request. If required, documentation can be provided in accessible formats.</p>	<p><a href="#">Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)</a> <del><a href="#">Frequently Asked Questions, Appeals &amp; Complaints (Document)</a></del> <a href="#">Glossary of Terms, Appeals &amp; Complaints (Document)</a> <a href="#">Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy)</a> <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Webpage)</a></p>

	<p>Policy advice can be obtained from our trained case officers in the Academic Services Team to support of the understanding and application of the policies and procedures. <u>Additionally, students can seek independent advice from the <del>AUSA Students' Union</del> students' union advice team at every stage of the appeals and complaints process. Further information pertaining to support for submission of an appeal and/or complaint is available on the University's Appeals and Complaints webpage.</u></p>	
<p><b>3. Information is clear and transparent.</b>  Providers explain key terms clearly, describe processes and time limits accurately, covering all types of course and partnership arrangements.</p>	<p><u>The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload.</u></p> <p>The University ensures that information is clear and transparent by providing all relevant information on the web (and through other means as necessary and as described in section 2). In addition to the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals and the Complaints Handling Procedure, resources include a glossary of terms and the relevant forms required as part of the process. Within the policies and procedures, clear guidance on how to conduct meetings with appellants/complainants at various stages through the process is in place, alongside all other aspects of the required processes. <u>Further information is available on the University's Appeals and Complaints webpages.</u></p> <p>In addition, the <del>Student</del>-Experience, <u>Engagement and Wellbeing</u> Team have a planned process of communication with students and, as part of that, information on appeals, complaints and procedures are provided. Information is also provided to students in course and programme handbooks.</p> <p>The Academic Services Team can provide guidance to individuals on the procedures for appeals and complaints. Where individuals require support in preparing their own specific case, they are able to seek that from the <del>Aberdeen University Students' Association</del><u>AUSA s</u><del>Students'</del><u>u</u><del>Union.</del></p>	<p><u><a href="#">Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)</a></u>  <u><a href="#">Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy)</a></u>  <u><a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage)</a></u>  <u><a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage)</a></u></p>

	<p>The University’s Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) complies with the model prescribed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).</p>	
<p>4. People raising concerns or making complaints or appeals are treated with dignity and respect, and their well-being is properly considered.</p> <p>Students raising issues and staff who are subject to complaints are treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and are supported appropriately.</p>	<p><a href="#">The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload.</a></p> <p>All students entering into an appeal or complaint are treated in a fair and appropriate way and, if appropriate, procedures are put in place to accommodate students’ specific needs. For example, these specific needs could include situations where students may be studying off-campus/online or if they have a disability.</p> <p>At all stages through the process, students are treated fairly and have the option to be accompanied to meetings regarding their appeal or complaint by a friend, relative or representative from <del>Aberdeen University Students’ Association (AUSA)</del><del>AUSA Students’ Union</del> <a href="#">the students’ union</a> aiming to ensure that the students are appropriately supported throughout the process.</p> <p>For each hearing of a case, there is a protocol for the conduct of the meeting to ensure a consistent approach which gives all parties an appropriate and fair opportunity to present their case and aims to ensure that all parties are treated with dignity and respect, and their well-being is appropriately considered. <a href="#">The protocols are available on the University’s Appeals and Complaints webpages.</a></p> <p>The University ensures that no student is disadvantaged by raising concerns. This aspect of our process is outlined in the University’s <i>Status of Students Pending the Outcome of Consideration of (a) an Academic Appeal or Complaint; or (b) Undergraduate Student Progress, or Fitness to Practise</i> policy, (see Supporting Documentation).</p>	<p><a href="#">Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Status of Students Pending the Outcome of Consideration of (a) an Academic Appeal or Complaint; or (b) Undergraduate Student Progress, or Fitness to Practice Policy (Policy)</a></p>
<p>5. Concerns, complaints and appeals processes are proportionate and allow for</p>	<p><a href="#">The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload.</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage)</a></p>

<p>cases to be resolved as early as possible.</p> <p>Providers consider cases thoroughly but proportionately. The required evidence in support of a case, and the decision, is proportionate.</p>	<p>In the policies and procedures for Student Appeals and Complaints, emphasis is placed on informal, early resolution to all cases. We understand that, normally, where situations and cases can be resolved more quickly, the experience is usually better for those involved. Where an early resolution is not possible, appellants and complainants transfer into the formal appeals and complaints processes. They do, of course, have the opportunity to go to the formal process immediately if they feel this is the most appropriate route.</p> <p>Our policies and procedures encourage constructive engagement, a transparent approach (e.g. in relation to timescales) and are person-centred. We aim to have in place the most effective and efficient experience for the individuals involved including the requirements for the evidence and submissions.</p>	
<p>6. Concerns, complaints and appeals procedures are fair and impartial.</p> <p>Procedures follow principles of procedural fairness and are applied consistently. Decision-makers are properly trained and resourced and have no conflict of interest in the matter. Providers give clear, detailed reasons for their decisions.</p>	<p><u><a href="#">The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload.</a></u></p> <p>Our policies and procedures are designed and operated in a way that aim to be fair and impartial. The University seeks to ensure all parties are treated in a fair and appropriate manner. As such, suitably trained case officers are assigned to each case to ensure administrative processes are adhered to and the appellant/complainant is fully informed at all stages. These officers are from our Academic Services Team and as such are always independent of the appeal or complaint <del>situation</del><u>investigation</u>.</p> <p><u><a href="#">In the submission of all initial stage appeals, the case will be reviewed by a Competency Panel who will determine whether the case meets the required criteria as set out in the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals and whether the case is in time. Impartial and trained academic staff investigate whether any appeal case is competent for progression. These academics are senior members of staff and are impartial to the case, being independent of the School in which the appellant is based.</a></u></p>	<p><u><a href="#">Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)</a></u>  <u><a href="#">Complaints Handling Procedure (Webpage)</a></u>  <u><a href="#">Policy Appeals and Complaints Webpages (Staff) (Webpage)</a></u>  <u><a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage)</a></u>  <u><a href="#">SPSO (Webpage)</a></u></p>

	<p>Where the cases are passed to an Investigating Officer, those mentioned in the case, or who may have previously dealt with issues raised in the case, will not be asked to investigate it, to ensure impartiality. Investigating Officers are independent of the situation.</p> <p>Where appellants proceed to the Grounds to Proceed stage, impartial and trained academic staff investigate whether there are grounds to proceed to a panel hearing. These academics are senior members of staff and are impartial to the case, being independent of the School in which the appellant is based. <a href="#">Consideration is undertaken by way of email and panellists reach a decision independently. Where disagreement occurs, a further panellist is sought and a decision is reached by way of consensus.</a></p> <p>Where internal mechanisms have been exhausted, students are issued with information related to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), and their case may be reviewed there.</p>	
<p>7. Confidentiality and anonymity are appropriately assured.</p> <p>Information is released only to those who need it to investigate or respond to the case.</p>	<p><a href="#">The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload.</a></p> <p>In line with University Data Protection policies, information related to cases of appeals and complaints are only be shared with the relevant parties involved in resolving the case. These parties include the case officer, Head of School (or nominee) investigating the case, and School administration contact.</p>	<p><a href="#">Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">SPSO (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Data Protection Policy (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Data Protection (Webpage)</a></p>
<p>8. Concerns, complaints and appeals are resolved in as timely a manner as possible.</p> <p>Providers operate reasonable timeframes and allow identification of concerns, complaints and appeals that require swift action. Staff are</p>	<p><a href="#">The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was revised for implementation in academic year 2024/25, and updated to consider the aspects listed below, as well as consideration of staff workload.</a></p> <p>In both the <i>Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals</i> and the <i>Complaints Handling Procedure</i>, emphasis is placed on informal, early resolution wherever possible. Policies and procedures have defined timescales to</p>	<p><a href="#">Policy and Procedure on Student Appeals (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Complaints Handling Procedure (Policy)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Staff) (Webpage)</a>  <a href="#">Appeals and Complaints (Students) (Webpage)</a></p>



<p>encouraged to deal with matters informally where appropriate. Students are informed if any delays occur.</p>	<p>manage expectations of those bringing forward a case, as well as to ensure cases are dealt with in the required timescales.</p> <p>When there is a situation where it is not be possible to meet the stated timescales, appellants and complainants are informed of the delay and are kept updated so that they are aware of progress and reasons for the delay (e.g. investigation of a complex case requiring extensive investigation).</p>	
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