



Higher Education Complaints Policy

2023/2024

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the DN Colleges Group (DNCG) provides excellent customer service and continually improves the quality of the student experience. DNCG is committed to facilitating and responding appropriately to any complaint made relating to the academic services provided on any Higher Education programmes it offers.
- 1.2 DNCG is committed to investigating and resolving complaints fairly, quickly and respectfully using this policy, which is based on the Office for the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework and the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Concerns, Complaints and Appeals.
- 1.3 Many complaints can be resolved informally, and you are encouraged to raise concerns or give feedback as early as possible to support a successful early resolution. We encourage you to attempt informal early resolution, where possible, by speaking directly to your Programme Leader or Deputy Head of School in the first instance. Formal proceedings should then be initiated if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of this initial attempt at resolution.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy sets out the measures in place at DNCG for students to raise a formal complaint regarding their experience on a Higher Education programme. This policy outlines the formal procedure for raising a complaint and should be followed if early informal resolution (see 1.3) is unsuccessful or unsatisfactory.
- 2.2 This policy applies to any student enrolled on, or recently enrolled on, a Higher Education programme of study at any DNCG campus. This policy may also be used by applicants to Academic Programmes at DNCG.
- 2.3 This complaints policy should not be used to request a review of a decision on academic progress, such as an awarded grade/mark, a progression decision such as failing a module or the year, or the calculation of your degree; nor should it be used to challenge academic judgement which is defined by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) as:
Academic judgement is a judgement that is made about a matter where only the opinion of an academic expert is sufficient. A decision about assessment, a degree classification, fitness to practise, research methodology or course content/outcomes will normally involve academic judgement.
- 2.4 DNCG will not investigate complaints from parents/guardians of students aged 18 or over without the written permission of the student.
- 2.5 Complaints may be made by completing the appropriate form (Appendix 1) and submitting it, with any evidence, in writing to the HE Quality Office at UCNL or University Campus Doncaster, or by email to qualityhe@dncolleges.ac.uk. In order for us to investigate your complaint properly, please provide any documents you have in support of your complaint/all relevant information to us at this stage.
- 2.6 Although issues raised in an anonymous complaint can still be brought to the attention of the appropriate college staff, it will not be possible to investigate and provide a formal written response to the issues raised in the normal manner.
- 2.7 Throughout the investigation of a complaint, the focus will be on resolution, rather than apportioning blame, and if the investigation identifies problems in our services, we will put in place measures to mitigate against future recurrence.

- 2.8 DNCG reserve the right to suspend any investigation if it becomes aware that police, legal, court or tribunal proceedings have been initiated in relation to the issues raised in the complaint. In addition, if there are allegations of a criminal offence, we may refer the matter to the police and suspend our own investigation until the outcome of any police investigation or criminal proceedings are known.

3 Responsibilities

- 3.1 DNCG is committed to thoroughly investigating any customer complaints and will aim to:
- thoroughly investigate any customer complaints, and will provide a response and ensure that any outcomes are used to inform future quality improvements
 - treat all customers fairly, respecting their dignity and privacy
 - communicate clearly and in a timely manner the outcomes of any investigation, including identification of next steps, where applicable
 - support colleagues to undertake investigations fairly, ethically and respectfully via staff training and regular communications
 - act on helpful and constructive comments made by our customers during the complaints process to improve our service
- 3.2 Normally, complaints should be raised as soon as possible following the incident/issue of complaint emerging, usually no later than three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We may consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.
- 3.3 You are expected to liaise with investigating officer if required during the investigation at agreed times/meetings, however it is not expected that complainants will contact the investigating officer outside of the investigation meetings.

4 Definitions and/or Relevant Legislation

- 4.1 Students studying on Higher Education programmes may be subject to regulations and policies belonging to the validating university, in relation to academic and quality assurance matters, available from:

University of Hull

<https://www.hull.ac.uk/choose-hull/university-and-region/key-documents/quality>

University of Lincoln

<https://secretariat.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/university-regulations/>

Sheffield Hallam University

<https://students.shu.ac.uk/regulations/>

University of Huddersfield

<https://www.hud.ac.uk/policies/registry/regs-taught/>

Pearson

<https://hnqglobal.highernationals.com/login>

5 The Policy

- 5.1 Complaints may be made by completing the appropriate form (Appendix 1) and submitting it, with any evidence, in writing to the HE Quality Office at UCNL or University Campus Doncaster, or by email to qualityhe@dncolleges.ac.uk .
- 5.2 Formal complaints must not be submitted to individual members of staff, as this may compromise the investigation process, and will not be processed according to the scope of this

policy. Staff appointed as investigating officers must not have been involved in matters leading to the complaint and must be free of actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

5.3 The process for handling complaints is detailed below:

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

- We encourage you to firstly try and resolve the issue informally, either by speaking directly with those concerned, your programme leader or Deputy Head of School.
- Possible resolution could include;
 - *Giving more information or a more detailed explanation*
 - *Suggesting solutions*
 - *Providing an apology where appropriate*
 - *Recommending further assistance or support*
- Should informal resolution not settle the issue, then you should proceed to Stage 2: Making a formal complaint

Stage 2: Making a formal complaint

- Formal complaints must be raised using SC1 Higher Education Student Complaints form (Appendix 1), and any evidence pertaining to the allegations should also be included at this stage.
- Complaints will be received and logged by the HE Quality Office and an investigating officer will be appointed. This will normally be a Head of School (external to the school where complaint is associated with) or appropriate manager.
- You will be notified that the complaint form has been received and the investigation will commence.

Stage 3: Investigation of complaint

- The Investigating Officer will undertake an investigation into the complaint, and may, at their discretion, contact you and/or any individuals implicated within the complaint.
- You will normally be contacted by the Investigating Officer within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. If this timescale is to be extended, you will be kept informed of progress.
- If you are required to attend a meeting as part of the investigation, you may be accompanied by a registered DNCG student or employee. However, any accompanying persons may not speak for the complainant or attend in place of the complainant. Legal representation will not be facilitated.
- The Investigating Officer will complete the form SCP1 Initial Investigation Stage (Appendix 2) to record findings. This document will not be shared with you due to the possibility of recording sensitive or confidential information which may compromise the privacy of individuals concerned. This form is for office use only as evidence that an investigation has taken place.
- The investigating officer will decide, *based on the available evidence*, the outcome of the investigation into the complaint.

Stage 4: Communication of outcome

- The HE Quality Office will formally communicate the outcome of the investigation, normally via email and/or letter, to the complainant within the timescale identified, clearly addressing all points raised in the original complaint, and indicating the outcome of the investigation.
- The outcome of the complaint will be summarised and communicated to you, normally within 20 working days of the complaint being raised. In some cases, it may take longer to conduct a thorough investigation, and in these cases the HE Quality Office will communicate any expected delays to you.
- The outcome of the investigation may be any of the following: Upheld, Partially Upheld or Not Upheld. If the outcome is upheld or partially upheld, there will be some resolution offered/described within the communication.
- If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, you may appeal the decision within 10 working days of the response

Stage 5: Appeal process

- Appeals must be raised using the form RAS1 Review and Appeal Stage (Appendix 3), and must be raised within 10 working days of the date of the outcome letter. No further or new evidence may be introduced to the investigation at this stage, without good reason, as the appeal will be based on the original complaint and original evidence gathered by the investigating officer.
- Any appeals will normally be referred to a member of the DNCG Senior Leadership Team who will review the evidence and investigating officers report against the original complaint and grounds for appeal.
- Appeals will normally be responded to within 10 working days of the appeal being received.

Stage 6: Completion of procedures

- Once you have exhausted the process covered in this policy (ie has gone through all above stage), a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued which will confirm this.
- If no appeal is made within 10 working days, an internal Completion of Procedures letter will be issued, which will confirm that the original complaint has been closed according to this policy.

Stage 7: Escalation to external agencies

- You have the right to escalate your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). However, the right to escalate only exists where all internal procedures have been exhausted. You are only eligible to escalate a complaint once you have received an internal Completion of Procedures (COP) letter from the College.
- Information about submitting a complaint to the OIA is available on the [OIA website](#).

All stages of the above process are summarised in a flowchart in Appendix 5.

6 Relevant Policies and Procedures

- 6.1 Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA): www.oiahe.org.uk

7 Who to Contact with Queries

- 7.1 Complaints may be made by contacting the HE Quality Office at UCNL or University Campus Doncaster, or by email to qualityhe@dncolleges.ac.uk. In order for us to investigate your complaint properly, please provide any documents you have in support of your complaint/all relevant information to us at this stage.

8 Communication

- 8.1 This policy will undergo scrutiny and approval at the Higher Education Academic Board, and will be communicated via publication on the websites and student intranet.

9 Authorisation

Policy Holder:	Rob Brown, Head of Quality and Regulation (Higher Education)
Approval Committee:	Higher Education Academic Board
Approval Date:	13 September 2023
Next Review Date:	June 2024

Appendix 1

SCP1 Higher Education Student Complaints Pro-Forma

The Student Complaints Procedure provides a formal means through which students can pursue any complaint they have against the services provided by the University Centres or by either of the Colleges generally and through which the College can resolve these complaints fairly and openly. This form should be completed as clearly and succinctly as possible.

The Student Complaints Procedure is to be used for:

- (i) concerns about the provision and delivery of academic programmes and related services;
- (ii) complaints about a student's experience at the College, including relationships with any member of staff.

The Students Complaints Procedure **cannot** be used for:

- (i) representations against decisions of Boards of Examiners (governed by the awarding bodies academic review and appeals procedures)
 - (ii) allegations of misconduct by students (governed by the Disciplinary Policy)
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Before completing this form: Please remember that most issues are most effectively resolved through early resolution

You are advised to attempt to resolve any concerns either directly with those concerned or with your Programme Leader, Academic Advocate or personal tutor. You are then strongly advised to follow the early resolution phase through the relevant Higher Education Directorate Leadership Team.

Anonymous complaints will only be admitted in exceptional circumstances.

Part A – PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name:	
2. Student Number: Campus:	
3. Programme:	
4. Level of Study:	
5. Address for Correspondence:	

6. Email Address:	
7. Phone Number:	

Part B – DETAILS OF THE COMPLAINT

<p>1. Please describe how you have pursued the early resolution options as described in the Complaints Procedure document. Please include details with all those you have spoken to/communicated with</p> <p>If you have not sought to resolve your concerns informally, please state why not</p>	
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<p>2. Please summarise the precise details of your complaint. It is <u>your</u> responsibility to identify, clearly, all the points of your complaint</p> <p>Your statement should include (as appropriate) details of the events complained of, to whom or what your complaint relates, relevant dates and an explanation of the negative impact on you</p> <p>You must provide documentary evidence to support your complaint (as appropriate) and append it to this form</p> <p>Please note that any senior person conducting an investigation may conduct an interview with you and take detailed notes</p>	
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3. Without prejudice, please indicate what you hope the result will be

Student Declaration

I can confirm that I have read the Student Complaints Procedure and that all information given on this form and documentary evidence attached is a true statement of facts to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

IMPORTANT: PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM AND ANY EVIDENCE YOU SUBMIT AS YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO PRODUCE IT IF YOUR COMPLAINT PROGRESSES TO FURTHER STAGES IN THE PROCEDURE

Office Use Only

Date Received:		Date forwarded and name of Senior Manager to investigate:	
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Appendix 2

SM1 Student Complaint Investigation Report

The senior manager assigned to the complaint must carry out a thorough, robust and impartial investigation, ensuring that all of the evidence relating to the complaint is examined.

The investigation will normally be concluded within 20 working days. This form is to be completed as the formal record of meetings held and the summary for recommendations.

PART A – COMPLAINT OUTCOME

1. Name of Complainant	
2. Please state if the complaint is substantiated, in whole or in part in your view	
3. If the complaint is wholly or partially upheld, please state the remedy (ies) recommended to the student together with any actions which need to be taken (immediately or for the future)	

Part B – SUMMARY OF THE INVESTIGATION

4. Please summarise the main points arising from your investigation, your assessment of the evidence submitted, the meetings you have conducted which have led you to the formal decision	
5. Please list the documentation and evidence presented; any additional evidence you gathered and from whom; dates and times of all meetings held/ visits made 6. NB all of the above must be formally documented and evidence submitted with this report.	

Signed:

Date:

Office Use Only

Date received by Executive Secretary:		Date forwarded to the complainant:	
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Appendix 3

Student Complaints Pro-Forma

Review and Appeal Stage – RAS1

This form is designed for students requesting a review of a complaint which has already been considered by a designated senior manager as part of the formal procedure stage.

Before completing this form:

You should have received a letter following investigation of your complaint through the formal procedure stage. This form must be completed and submitted for the attention of the Quality Officer or by email to qualityhe@dncolleges.ac.uk within 10 working days from receipt of your letter.

Please ensure that you append a copy of your original SCP1 form together with any documentary evidence. Please note that you cannot, at this stage, add any further concerns or issues to your complaint.

Part A – PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name of Student:	
2. Enrolment Number: Campus location:	
3. Address for Correspondence:	
4. Email Address:	
5. Phone Number:	

Part B – REASONS FOR REQUESTING A REVIEW

6. Please provide a statement as to why the decision of the senior manager who investigated your complaint was not satisfactory (your reasons must be clearly stated and relate to an objective factor such as a procedural issue, failure to consider the evidence presented or over the reasonableness of the outcome).	
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<p>7 Please cite the evidence you are submitting to support your review request.</p> <p><u>Note:</u> you may not introduce at the Review and Appeal stage any evidence which was available to you but had not been submitted at the earlier stage.</p>	
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Student Declaration

I can confirm that I have read the Student Complaints Procedure and that all information given on this form and documentary evidence attached is a true statement of facts to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed:

Date:

IMPORTANT: PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM AND ANY EVIDENCE YOU SUBMIT AS YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO PRODUCE IT IF YOUR COMPLAINT PROGRESSES TO FURTHER STAGES IN THE PROCEDURE

Office Use Only

Date Received:		Principal Review Scheduled:		Principal's Decision:	
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Appendix 4 Completion of Procedures Letter Template

Please note - the format may be adjusted to meet the individual circumstances of a complaint provided that the key points below are included.

Dear [*Name of complainant*]

Completion of Procedures Letter

This letter confirms that the internal procedures of this, the DN Colleges Group, in relation to your Complaint have now been completed.

The issue(s) that you raised were: [*brief details*]

The issue(s) that were considered in relation to your complaint was / were*: [*brief summary of the complaint etc*].

The final decision of is* [*detail*] because [*reasons*].

The procedure applied was as required in the DN Colleges Group for complaints relating to Higher Education.

The DN Colleges Group subscribe to the independent scheme for the review of student complaints. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome you may be able to apply for a review of your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provided that the complaint you take to the OIA is eligible under its Rules.

Should you decide to make a complaint to the OIA, your OIA Complaint Form **must be received by the OIA** within **12 months** of the date of this letter, that is, it must be received by the OIA **on or before** [*insert date - e.g. if the Completion of Procedures Letter is dated 9 July 2024, this date should be 9 July 2025*].

[*Include here any factors of which the provider is aware which mean that it is particularly important for the student to bring the complaint promptly.*]

You can fill in the OIA's complaint form online or download a copy from the OIA website. <http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx>. The OIA also has information and guidance for students on their website and this can be found at <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/>. Alternatively, you can telephone or write to the OIA for a form. **You should send a copy of this letter to the OIA with your OIA Complaint Form.**

Guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can also be found on the OIA's website <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us/>.

Please note that the OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with through the provider's internal procedures.

Yours sincerely

[Authorised signatory]

Appendix 5 Summary of Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Once informal resolution has concluded, you should then proceed to Stage 2 of the process.

