



# **UK Quality Code for Higher Education**

**Part B: Assuring and Enhancing  
Academic Quality**

**Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student  
Complaints**

PART  
**B**

# Contents

<b>About the Quality Code</b>	1
<b>About this Chapter</b>	3
<b>Introduction: Academic appeals and student complaints</b>	4
<b>Expectation</b>	7
<b>Indicators of sound practice</b>	8
The basis of effective appeals and complaints procedures	8
Information, advice and guidance	9
Internal procedures: design and implementation	11
Action, monitoring and enhancement	13
<b>Appendix 1 - The Expectation and Indicators</b>	15
<b>Appendix 2 - Membership of the advisory group for this Chapter</b>	16
<b>References</b>	18

# About the Quality Code

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers.<sup>1</sup> It makes clear what higher education providers are required to do, what they can expect of each other, and what students and the general public can expect of them. The Quality Code covers all four nations of the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and all providers of UK higher education operating internationally. It protects the interests of all students, regardless of where they are studying or whether they are full-time, part-time, undergraduate or postgraduate students.

The Quality Code has three Parts. Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards contains three Chapters and seven Expectations. Each of the 11 Chapters of Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality, and Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision contain a single Expectation. An Expectation expresses the key principle that the higher education community has identified as essential for the assurance of academic standards and quality within the area covered by the respective Chapter or Part. Higher education providers reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) are required to meet all the Expectations. The manner in which they do so is their own responsibility. QAA carries out reviews to check whether higher education providers are meeting the Expectations.<sup>2</sup>

The Expectations in Part C and each Chapter of Part B are accompanied by a series of Indicators that reflect sound practice, and through which providers can demonstrate they are meeting the relevant Expectation. Indicators are not designed to be used as a checklist; they are intended to help providers reflect on and develop their regulations, procedures and practices to demonstrate that the Expectations in the Quality Code are being met. Each Indicator is supported by an explanatory note that gives more information about it, together with examples of how the Indicator may be interpreted in practice. Indicators are grouped into clusters under a heading. There are no Indicators in Part A. The explanatory text provided directly supports the relevant Expectation.

Each Part and Chapter has been developed by QAA through an extensive process of consultation with higher education providers; their representative bodies; the National Union of Students; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; and other interested parties. The *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General Introduction*<sup>3</sup> should be considered in conjunction with this document. It provides a technical introduction for users, including guidance concerning the terminology used and a quick-reference glossary. A more detailed glossary is available on QAA's website.<sup>4</sup>

## The Quality Code and legislation

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding bodies. The Quality Code does not interpret legislation nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Part or Chapter where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.

## Equality and diversity in the Quality Code

The Quality Code promotes an inclusive approach by embedding consideration of equality and diversity matters throughout. Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, irrespective of the group or groups to which they belong, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, for example, because of a declared disability, specific cultural background, location or age, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in and responsibility for promoting equality.

Equality of opportunity involves enabling access for people who have differing individual requirements as well as eliminating arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning. In addition, disabled students and non-disabled students are offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever

necessary. Offering an equal opportunity to learn is distinguished from every student having an equal chance of success, because this is dependent on a range of factors including their motivation and engagement in learning.

All higher education providers have legal obligations which they must meet, for example in relation to equality of opportunity and eliminating unlawful discrimination (in the UK particular considerations, such as the anticipatory duty to provide reasonable adjustments, apply to disabled students). The Quality Code does not seek to duplicate or interpret these requirements.

## About this Chapter

This publication supersedes the *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (the Code of Practice), Section 5: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints on Academic Matters* (2007) published by QAA, and forms a Chapter of the Quality Code.

It was subject to public consultation between November 2012 and January 2013 and was published in April 2013. It became a reference point for the purposes of reviews carried out by QAA from August 2014.

# Introduction: Academic appeals and student complaints

*Chapter B9: Academic appeals and Student Complaints* of the Quality Code sets out principles for addressing academic appeals (appeals) and complaints about the quality of learning opportunities (complaints) by students in higher education providers.

## Definitions

This Chapter of the Quality Code defines an academic appeal as a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progression, assessment and awards. It defines a complaint as the expression of a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of a student's learning opportunities.

## Scope

The term 'student' is used broadly to include those who are studying for a higher education award at a higher education provider, whether the award is taught or research, and irrespective of the mode or location of learning or delivery.

Principles relating to appeals and complaints with respect to admission to study are addressed in *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*.

More detailed information relating specifically to appeals and complaints by research students is provided in *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*.

Where higher education providers are working with others to provide learning opportunities, responsibilities for considering appeals and complaints are included in the written agreement between the organisations concerned. The management of arrangements involving two or more providers/organisations is addressed in *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*.

This Chapter also recognises that other corporate bodies, such as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, may have responsibilities for appeals and complaints which may overlap with those of the provider, or which may require that the relevant body be involved in the handling of a particular appeal or complaint. Providers make clear to staff and students where this is the case.

Appeals or complaints may be made by individual students or, in appropriate cases, collectively by groups of students.

## Equality and diversity

In designing and implementing procedures for appeals and complaints providers have regard to: the need to eliminate discrimination; harassment and victimisation; to advance equality of opportunity; and to foster good relations. Providers ensure that procedures apply equally to all students irrespective of whether any individual student possesses one or more 'protected' characteristics.

The effective resolution of appeals and complaints depends on all those involved - staff and students - engaging in a way which recognises the interests and concerns of each other, and approaching the matter with objectivity and respect. Higher education providers therefore encourage students to recognise that an outcome which is not the one they might have been seeking is nevertheless valid, provided the process has been designed and implemented in a way which is fair and based on the consideration of relevant available evidence. Providers have arrangements enabling them to reject complaints that are vexatious.

Higher education providers safeguard as far as reasonably practicable the interests and well-being of students lodging an appeal or complaint and of staff who may be named or otherwise involved.

In particular they provide information, advice and guidance for students and staff at each stage of the process.

## Distinguishing appeals and complaints procedures

As this Chapter forms part of the Quality Code, its remit is necessarily limited to academic appeals and complaints about the quality of learning opportunities. This does not preclude higher education providers extending these principles to appeals or complaints on other matters, such as disciplinary or harassment procedures, where they consider this appropriate. Indeed, it is acknowledged that many higher education providers operate a single complaints system, which embraces both academic and non-academic complaints.

The Expectation and Indicators in this Chapter do not generally distinguish between appeals and complaints because of the high level of commonality in the underlying principles applicable to both. The Chapter is designed to assist higher education providers whether they operate separate or combined arrangements for addressing appeals and complaints by students. It also acknowledges that there may be times when a student submits an appeal which contains within it a complaint, or a complaint which contains within it an appeal, and that a higher education provider may need to reclassify an individual case and inform the student of this decision.

## Alternative arrangements for resolving appeals and complaints

Higher education providers determine the most appropriate arrangements to facilitate the resolution of appeals and complaints. This may involve opportunities for resolution through mediation or less formal means which are additional to or separate from the formal processes. Providers make clear to students how such arrangements relate to the formal processes, in particular being explicit about any time limits which may apply at each stage, and any opportunities to move between processes.

## Appeals and complaints as a source of feedback

The investigation of appeals and complaints provides an important source of feedback for providers which contributes to the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities and improvement of processes for maintaining the academic standards of awards. Providers have in place appropriate arrangements for learning from cases irrespective of the outcome of the individual case. Such arrangements complement other opportunities for engaging with students and obtaining individual and collective feedback on academic matters. (Student engagement in quality systems is addressed in *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*.)

## Independent review

Higher education providers ensure that they meet the requirements of any applicable schemes or arrangements for the independent review of academic appeals and complaints.

In England and Wales students at higher education providers within the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Scheme have a right of access to the OIA, as long as the provider's internal procedures have been exhausted. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has similar jurisdiction for Scottish universities, with requirements set out in the published Model Complaints Handling Procedures.

In Northern Ireland students at The Queen's University of Belfast and the University of Ulster have access to their respective Visitor.

# QAA Concerns Scheme

QAA can investigate concerns about the academic standards and quality of higher education provision, and about the information higher education providers make available about the learning opportunities they offer. Where there is evidence of weaknesses which go beyond a single, isolated occurrence, and where the evidence suggests broader failings in the management of academic quality and standards, QAA can investigate. These concerns can be raised by students, staff, organisations, and the public. Further information, including a guide for applicants, is provided on the QAA website.<sup>5</sup>

## External links

Higher education providers are responsible for ascertaining which laws and regulations apply to them. To meet the Expectation of this Chapter of the Quality Code, institutions may wish to consider the indicative lists of further guidelines, references and resources. QAA takes no responsibility for the content of external websites.

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### Further guidelines, references and resources

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), which covers England and Wales:

[www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, *Remedies and Redress*:

[www.oiahe.org.uk/media/42902/oia\\_remedies\\_and\\_redress\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/42902/oia_remedies_and_redress_leaflet.pdf)

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman:

[www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)

[www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/further-and-higher-education/](http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/further-and-higher-education/)

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (2012) *The Scottish Higher Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure*:

[www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/wp-content/media/The-Scottish-Higher-Education-Model-Complaints-Handling-Procedure2.pdf](http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/wp-content/media/The-Scottish-Higher-Education-Model-Complaints-Handling-Procedure2.pdf)

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# Expectation

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about academic appeals and student complaints which higher education providers are required to meet.

**Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.**

# Indicators of sound practice

## The basis of effective appeals and complaints procedures

### Indicator 1

**Higher education providers make available opportunities for students to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage.**

Higher education providers make clear who has access to their appeals and complaints procedures and take appropriate steps to reduce the likelihood of students being inhibited from making an appeal or complaint due to a concern that they may be treated less favourably as a consequence.

Higher education providers pay particular attention to clarifying that the procedures apply to: current students, including those on placement or engaged in work-based learning, or on an approved leave of absence; and recent students (as defined by the higher education provider), giving those who have recently left their programme the opportunity to raise issues of appeal or complaint in a reasonable and explicitly defined period after the end of their studies.

Where higher education providers are working with other partners, delivery organisations or support providers to offer learning opportunities they provide staff and students with transparent information about the procedures and responsibilities of the respective organisations with which they are working. This includes making explicit to which body an appeal or complaint must be directed, and the extent to which the other body or bodies would be involved in considering such an appeal or complaint. Students studying with delivery organisations which are not the degree-awarding body have the ultimate right of appeal to that awarding body. Degree-awarding bodies make provision for the review of complaints where procedures at the delivery organisation have been exhausted.

Such arrangements are included in the written agreement between the organisations concerned. The management of arrangements involving two or more providers/organisations is addressed in *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*.

Higher education providers recognise that students may wish to lodge appeals and complaints collectively and make clear how such collective action will be managed (for example, through a single spokesperson) including how the provider will take reasonable steps to ensure that a collective complaint fairly represents the views of all members of the group.

Higher education providers consider issues of confidentiality and disclosure in the design and operation of their procedures, and make clear whether they will consider anonymous complaints.

*Chapter B11: Research Degrees* addresses a specific need for there to be independent and formal procedures dealing with appeals and complaints in the context of research degrees. The Expectation and Indicators in *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints* complement and expand upon *Chapter B11*.

The principles applying to appeals and complaints by applicants are addressed in *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*.

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### Further guidelines, references and resources

UK Council for International Student Affairs, *Working Group on Complaints and Redress: Findings and conclusions*:

[www.ukcisa.org.uk/uploads/media/114/16359.pdf](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/uploads/media/114/16359.pdf)

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## Indicator 2

**Higher education providers have procedures which encourage constructive engagement with the appeals and complaints process and which offer opportunities for early and/or informal resolution.**

The most effective route to resolution of an appeal or complaint is one in which all parties engage in a spirit of cooperation. Higher education providers promote confidence among students in the fairness and objectivity of the procedures and their implementation, and an understanding on the part of students of the need for procedures which ensure that academic standards can be maintained (for example by not allowing changes to assessment outcomes without clear evidence that an outcome is unsound).

Clear processes, which are not unduly legalistic or potentially intimidating, and which provide students with appropriate opportunities to provide relevant evidence, contribute to developing such confidence. Where students can see that the higher education provider has taken action previously in response to issues identified through appeals and complaints, this also builds trust and confidence in the process.

Higher education providers consider the ways in which alternative means for resolving complaints may help to achieve earlier resolution. Where there are such opportunities these are publicised to staff and students. Clear information is provided as to how these arrangements fit with more formal procedures and of any time limits which may apply. In particular students are informed of whether, and in what circumstances, they might move between such alternative means and the formal procedures.

Alternative means might include various forms of impartial mediation, whether managed by staff of the provider or through an independent party. The purpose of establishing such arrangements may be limited to enabling individuals to explore the focus of their complaint and to seek advice, separate from the higher education provider's complaints processes. In other cases, they may be intended to provide a forum for reaching a decision or a solution. Where providers' arrangements facilitate access to mediation or other alternative dispute resolution services, they make clear to students and staff the scope of the services, and whether their use is subject to the parties agreeing in advance to accept the solution offered or the findings reached.

Higher education providers consider how they could learn from complaints that are resolved through such alternative arrangements and how recurring issues can be identified and acted on at a more strategic level if necessary, without unduly changing the nature of the arrangements. (See further Indicator 7 regarding the recording and monitoring of appeals and complaints.)

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### Further guidelines, references and resources

Improving Dispute Resolution Service:  
[www.staffs.ac.uk/idr/index.html](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/idr/index.html)

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# Information, advice and guidance

## Indicator 3

**Higher education providers have accessible appeals and complaints procedures.**

Accessible procedures are published in a way which makes them easy to find, are written in a way that is clear to students, and take into account equality and diversity issues and barriers to access. Providers enable students to find out how to access the procedures easily, for example by signposting them from student handbooks. Significant changes to existing versions are drawn to the attention of all affected students and staff in a timely manner.

The procedures clarify the difference between an academic appeal and a complaint and how a case that contains both will be managed. Where separate procedures exist (for example, for dealing with complaints of harassment or discrimination), the difference between the procedures and the consequences for those following them is explained. The procedures also inform students of any alternative form of resolution that may exist (for example, mediation) and how this might be accessed.

The scope and grounds for academic appeals are clearly stated, as are the circumstances that are not grounds for such appeals. Where procedures do not allow appeal for specific reasons - for example, academic judgement or competency standards - the procedure explains what is meant by those terms.

Providers distinguish between complaints (as set out in this Chapter) and opportunities for individual and collective feedback as part of their ongoing engagement with students regarding academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities (as set out in *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*).

The provision of information relating to current students is addressed in Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision.

Where the higher education provider is working with one or more partners, delivery organisations or support providers to offer learning opportunities, information makes clear to students which organisation's procedures apply to them and how they can access those procedures (see also *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*).

## Indicator 4

**Clear and accurate advice and guidance is made available for students making an appeal or complaint, and for staff involved in handling or supporting appeals and complaints.**

The provision of opportunities for students to obtain appropriate advice and guidance is an important part of ensuring that students can make informed decisions about whether and how to lodge an appeal or complaint, and therefore make effective use of the applicable procedures. Higher education providers make clear to students the distinction between procedural advice, and advocacy and support, and where each can be sought.

In order for such opportunities to be effective, higher education providers make available to staff and students contact information for those authorised to provide such support and advice. Such persons might include members of students' representative bodies, professional associations or trades unions.

Providers pay particular attention to ensuring equality of access to advice and guidance and an inclusive environment for all students. In so doing they take account of students who possess any of the protected characteristics, and students studying at different locations (including while on placement or other employer-based environments) and through online arrangements. Where appropriate, and in particular for students with a declared disability, providers ensure that information is available to them in appropriate

formats at all stages, and that reasonable adjustments are made to any proceedings to accommodate their needs.

Providers recognise that handling appeals and complaints is an increasingly specialised and technically demanding area of work. In order that staff involved can be alert to the interests of all parties, the general legal context and the applicable regulations and precedents, suitable induction and briefing, and opportunities for professional updating are provided for all relevant staff. These might include:

- promoting an appreciation of the need for impartiality and avoidance of the creation of a perception of bias
- appropriate approaches to handling evidence and witnesses
- issues of confidentiality and data protection.

Higher education providers understand the potential impact of appeals and complaints on staff, particularly on those who may be the subject of a complaint and for those implementing the provider's procedures. In addition to considering what support and advice they may need to provide for those making an appeal or a complaint, higher education providers also consider how to safeguard the interests of staff, including those handling appeals and complaints.

## Internal procedures: design and implementation

### Indicator 5

**Academic appeals and complaints procedures are conducted in a timely and fair manner.**

To promote ownership of appeals and complaints procedures at the highest level and in turn promote transparency, higher education providers engage students in the development and approval of procedures, and those procedures are ratified by the provider's relevant senior decision-making body. (For further information on involving students, see *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*.)

Procedures are designed and operated so that they are fair, including: being proportionate, allowing for objective and impartial consideration, and allowing all parties to engage on as equal a footing as possible.

### Designing appeals and complaints procedures

As part of the design process for their appeals and complaints procedures, and in addition to the sound practice set out in the other Indicators in this Chapter, higher education providers consider:

- the number of stages involved, and whether multi-stage processes might lead to unreasonable delay or prevent students from accessing an independent review stage
- making explicit indicative timescales for key stages, taking into account relevant national and international guidance on good practice
- how to establish clear criteria for any initial process to determine whether grounds exist for appeal or complaint, and how to provide the student with an opportunity to dispute such a preliminary finding
- how the procedures relate to other organisational schemes for raising concerns (for example whistle blowing and harassment procedures)
- whether appeals procedures make clear where the authority rests to make the final decision on assessment decisions within an appeals process
- the expectations that exist for the standards of behaviour by students, what is considered to be unacceptable behaviour, and the potential consequences of such behaviour
- whether the provider wishes to adopt and publish a policy on meeting reasonable and proportionate incidental expenses incurred by a student complaining or appealing

- the relationship of procedures to those of any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
- the impact on procedures if students take their case to law while an appeal or complaints procedure is still active, or before any procedure has been initiated
- whether legal or other representation is permissible in internal arrangements.

## Operating appeals and complaints procedures

In the operation of appeals and complaints procedures, and in addition to the sound practice set out in the other Indicators in this Chapter, higher education providers consider:

- making provision for face to face meetings where the absence of such provision might be considered unfair (for example, where the interpretation of evidence is disputed, or where the potential impact of the outcome is very significant for the student)
- how such meetings might be managed where the student is at a distance from those staff responsible for handling the appeal or complaint, including whether alternative arrangements are acceptable, and if so under what terms
- calling on specialist advice (which may be in-house) where appropriate in cases where issues of equality and diversity are a factor
- how they will manage all proceedings so that they are conducted in a timely manner, with adequate notice of the subject of the appeal or complaint given to all parties, and timely information given to the student about the composition of the panel and others who may attend to give evidence
- the schedule for informing the student in a timely manner of any right to attend, any right to be accompanied or represented (and if so by whom), and any rights to submit evidence or call witnesses
- how they will provide equal access for all parties to all the evidence that will be used as a basis for determining the outcome (bearing in mind any necessary constraints due to data protection).

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### Further guidelines, references and resources

QAA (2010) *Raising Concerns about Standards and Quality in Higher Education: a Guide for Applicants*:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=41](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=41)

QAA (Scotland) *Protocol for Managing Potential Risks to Quality and Academic Standards*:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Protocol-for-managing-potential-risks-to-quality-and-academic-standards-08.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Protocol-for-managing-potential-risks-to-quality-and-academic-standards-08.pdf)

Academic Registrars' Council (2011) *A Reference Document For Academic Appeals and Extenuating Circumstances for University Practitioners*:

[www.arc.ac.uk/PageInfo.aspx?practitioner-7-Student-Complaints-and-Appeals.html](http://www.arc.ac.uk/PageInfo.aspx?practitioner-7-Student-Complaints-and-Appeals.html)

National Union of Students *Charter on Student Complaints and Appeals*:

[www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/open/highereducation/NUS-Charter-on-Complaints-and-Appeals/](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/open/highereducation/NUS-Charter-on-Complaints-and-Appeals/)

National Union of Students (2009) *Review of Institutional Complaints and Appeals Procedures in England and Wales*:

[www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/350/Complaints%20Report%20-%20Final%2015.02.09%20Pdf.pdf](http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/350/Complaints%20Report%20-%20Final%2015.02.09%20Pdf.pdf)

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# Action, monitoring and enhancement

## Indicator 6

**Higher education providers ensure that appropriate action is taken following an appeal or complaint.**

When a finding on an appeal or a complaint has been determined, higher education providers communicate the outcome promptly to the student and to any other relevant parties, which may include partners, delivery organisations or support providers the provider works with to provide learning opportunities. Effective outcomes give clear reasons for reaching the decision which students can understand. This helps the student determine whether or not to pursue the matter further.

Where an appeal or complaint is upheld, higher education providers explain how and when they will implement any remedy, and whether that might include an apology.

At the point where internal procedures have been completed, the provider ensures that the student is provided with a clear written statement, confirming that its internal procedures have reached completion, stating the outcome that has been reached, and advising the student of any relevant external procedures to which they have recourse if they remain dissatisfied.

Where the provider is subject to the jurisdiction of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) in England and Wales, or the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) in Scotland, it ensures that this written statement meets the OIA or SPSO's requirements for a 'completion of procedures' letter. In Northern Ireland the universities ensure that their procedures meet the requirements of the applicable University Visitor.

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## Further guidelines, references and resources

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), which covers England and Wales:

[www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, *Remedies and Redress*:

[www.oiahe.org.uk/media/42902/oia\\_remedies\\_and\\_redress\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/42902/oia_remedies_and_redress_leaflet.pdf)

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman:

[www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)

[www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/further-and-higher-education/](http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/further-and-higher-education/)

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (2012) *The Scottish Higher Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure*:

[www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/wp-content/media/The-Scottish-Higher-Education-Model-Complaints-Handling-Procedure2.pdf](http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/wp-content/media/The-Scottish-Higher-Education-Model-Complaints-Handling-Procedure2.pdf)

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## Indicator 7

**Higher education providers monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their appeals and complaints procedures, and reflect on the outcomes of those procedures for enhancement purposes.**

Monitoring and evaluation can assist three aspects of the work of higher education providers:

- ensuring and enhancing the effectiveness of their appeals and complaints procedures
- enhancing the overall quality of the student learning experience
- and as part of promoting effective student engagement in quality management, fostering confidence in the appeals and complaints processes.

Monitoring how their appeals and complaints procedures work overall, and maintaining records of such monitoring over time, enables higher education providers to be confident that procedures are fair and are working as they intend. In order to monitor operation effectively, higher education providers take a systematic approach to recording appeals and complaints, and consider the extent to which it is possible or appropriate to monitor alternative means of resolution (see Indicator 2).

Oversight of the implementation of appeals and complaints procedures is maintained by an appropriate senior body which receives reports of numbers, types and outcomes of appeals and complaints. Such reports may also include other relevant factors, for example: level and mode of study of those making appeals and complaints; whether they are international or UK students; or whether they are studying through arrangements with other providers or organisations.

Reporting and evaluation also assists higher education providers when they review periodically the design and conduct of their appeals and complaints procedures. Such reviews, which engage students in the process of review, can help make sure that appeals and complaints procedures remain in step with other procedures and arrangements, with legislative requirements and general expectations of good practice in handling appeals and complaints in higher education.

Monitoring and evaluating their appeals and complaints procedures also enables higher education providers to gather valuable feedback for enhancement purposes, and to share good practice internally. Where providers work with other partners, delivery organisations or support providers to offer learning opportunities they exploit opportunities for enhancement working with these organisations.

The provision of summary information to staff and students on the actions taken in response to appeals and complaints helps to raise awareness of the procedures and build the confidence of students and staff in their transparency and effectiveness.

# Appendix 1 - The Expectation and Indicators Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

## The Expectation

The Quality Code sets out the following Expectation about appeals and complaints, which higher education providers are required to meet.

**Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.**

## The Indicators of sound practice

### Indicator 1

Higher education providers make available opportunities for students to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage.

### Indicator 2

Higher education providers have procedures which encourage constructive engagement with the appeals and complaints process and which offer opportunities for early and/or informal resolution.

### Indicator 3

Higher education providers have accessible appeals and complaints procedures.

### Indicator 4

Clear and accurate advice and guidance is available for students making an appeal or complaint, and for staff involved in handling or supporting appeals and complaints.

### Indicator 5

Academic appeals and complaints procedures are conducted in a timely and fair manner.

### Indicator 6

Higher education providers ensure that appropriate action is taken following an appeal or complaint.

### Indicator 7

Higher education providers monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their appeals and complaints procedures, and reflect on the outcomes of those procedures for enhancement purposes.

## Appendix 2 - Membership of the advisory group for this Chapter

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Keith Barker	Policy Advisor	Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
Mandi Barron	Head of Student Services	Bournemouth University
Dr Tim Burton	Assistant Director	QAA (Chair)
Dr Dawn Edwards	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement	Royal Northern College of Music
Nick Entwistle*	Research and Policy Officer (HE)	National Union of Students
Kez Hayat	Equality and Diversity Officer	University of Bradford
Mary Henaghan	Head of Governance and Academic Quality	Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Constantinos Ierotheou	Director of Learning and Quality, School of Computing & Mathematical Sciences	University of Greenwich
Sharon Jones	Academic Registrar	University of Sussex
Lucy Kerry	Education and Professional Development Manager	The British Psychological Society
Mary Kirby	Director of Business Services, Student Services	The Open University
Anne Lee*	Adjudication Manager	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
Paul McFadden	Head of Complaints Standards	Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
Felicity Mitchell	Deputy Adjudicator	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
Dr Iain Morrison	Head of Student Services	University of the Highlands and Islands

Iain Rowan	Assistant Director, Academic Services	University of Sunderland (specialist writer)
Richard Stock	Deputy Academic Registrar	The University of Essex
Roxy Shamsolmaali	Quality and Student Engagement Consultant	National Union of Students
Clive Turner	Head of Higher Education and CCNQ	City College, Norwich
Denise Williams	Deputy Academic Registrar	University of Glamorgan
Gail Wilson	Development Officer	QAA (Secretariat)

\* alternates

# References

<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode)

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review)

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181)

<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary)

<sup>5</sup> Such investigations are designed to improve the overall quality of UK higher education by addressing weaknesses within a particular higher education provider. They differ from complaints in that QAA is unable to provide redress (compensation or otherwise) to an individual who raises a concern.

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