



Annex 7.4

Student complaints policy and procedure

1. Introduction

1.1. As a mature, degree-awarding, higher education institution, Harper Adams encourages students to raise concerns, questions, problems and grievances promptly and responsibly. Prompt expression of concerns and/or grievances directly with the member of staff involved will normally lead to a quick and satisfactory informal resolution of most issues. This should always be the first method by which students attempt to deal with concerns and/or grievances.

The College seeks to resolve students' complaints as near to their source as possible and believes that most are capable of resolution without recourse to formal procedures. To this end, staff will make every reasonable effort to deal promptly and efficiently with all concerns and complaints brought to their attention. Nevertheless, the Academic Board recognises that these informal mechanisms may not always lead to a satisfactory resolution of issues raised, and has, therefore, adopted a formal complaints procedure which is explained in Section 3.

1.2. The College Academic Board assures all students that reasonable complaints and criticisms are normal and perfectly acceptable in a responsible education institution, even if this means questioning authority. Students will not be blamed for raising legitimate concerns. However, the College is prepared to defend its staff against spurious complaints, particularly those of a serious nature, which can affect the professional reputation of individuals. Disciplinary action will, therefore, be taken if a complaint is shown to be frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice.

1.3. The Complaints Procedure applies to any kind of student grievance, other than appeals against an academic assessment decision of an Assessments Board, appeals against a disciplinary decision or research degrees complaints, for each of which separate procedures exist.

1.4. A complaint can be defined as any expression of dissatisfaction with any service or lack of service provided by the College to which a response is reasonably expected, and in respect of which the informal approach outlined in 1.1 above has not produced a satisfactory outcome.

1.5. The College recognises that there are different sources of complaints (eg academic educational matters, academic administrative matters, academic support services, non-academic support services). Nevertheless, to avoid confusion, the Academic Board has established a single complaints procedure. However, account has been taken of the need for individual treatment of each complaint by establishing different responsibilities within the procedure.

2. Policy

2.1. The College will make every reasonable effort to deal promptly and efficiently with all complaints.

2.2. All complaints will be judged on their individual merit and will be dealt with in confidence, unless the complainant has clearly indicated otherwise.

2.3. All complaints will be thoroughly and objectively investigated.

- 2.4. In accordance with the College's Equal Opportunities policy, all complainants will be treated equally regardless of their status and will not be treated adversely as a result of their making a complaint.
- 2.5. Where at any stage in the complaints procedure a grievance is made the subject of a formal discussion or hearing, students may, if they so wish, be accompanied by another person of their choice.
- 2.6. All complaints will be recorded in writing and will be subject to a monitoring and reporting system.

3. Procedure for complaints

- 3.1. If a student considers that he/she has cause to complain about any aspect of the College's provisions/services he/she should submit the complaint to the line manager of the member of staff who dealt with the issue under the informal mechanism specified in 1.1.
- 3.2. If the complainant has any doubts as to whom to complain, he/she should seek advice from the Academic Registrar who will ensure that the complaint is appropriately referred.
- 3.3. All complaints must be summarised in writing and submitted on a complaints form (Annex 7.5), copies of which are available from the Registry.
- 3.4. Complaints should be made without undue delay. The normal time limit for completing a complaints form and handing it to the responsible person is:
 - (i) within 4 weeks after having become aware of the matter the student is dissatisfied with;
 - or**
 - (ii) within 2 weeks after receiving an informal response under 1.1.

Extension of these time limits will normally only be possible in exceptional circumstances, such as illness or other circumstances beyond the student's control.

- 3.5. On receipt of a complaints form, the line manager will photocopy the form and lodge a copy with the Academic Registrar. Thereafter, the line manager will keep a file of all material concerning the complaint and will keep a record of the investigations made and of any action(s) taken.
- 3.6. The line manager must give the complainant a written response as soon as possible, but at the latest within 10 working days after the complaint form has been received.
- 3.7. If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, the complaint and the reason(s) for dissatisfaction with the response can be submitted in writing, by the complainant, to the Vice Principal (VP) for academic grievances or to the University College Secretary (UCS) for non-academic grievances.
- 3.8. The VP/UCS may seek to resolve the issue on the basis of the documentation provided, or may, at his/her discretion, call a hearing at which the student and any other persons involved may submit their respective cases.
- 3.9. Following this process the VP/UCS will communicate his/her decision in writing to the student within 10 working days of the date on which the VP/UCS received the complaint. The student will be given 15 working days in which to appeal against the decision to the Principal. If no appeal is received within this period, a Completion of

Procedures letter will be sent to the student, including information about the role of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

3.10. On satisfactory resolution of the complaint the file will be deposited with the Academic Registrar.

3.11. If the Vice Principal or the University College Secretary is personally involved in the complaint itself, the complaint form should be submitted to the Academic Registrar who will delegate it to another person who is not personally involved.

4. Appeal

4.1. In cases where the grievance remains unresolved, the complainant may appeal in writing to the Principal and must indicate the reasons why it is considered that exceptional circumstances exist. The VP/UCS will provide the Principal all the necessary details of the case and an account of the measures which have already been taken to resolve the difficulties.

4.2. The Principal will review the circumstances of the case and will, if necessary, take further advice. The Principal may seek to resolve the issue on the basis of the documentation provided or may call a hearing at which the complainant and any other persons involved may present their individual cases.

4.3. The Principal's decision will be communicated to the student in a Completion of Procedures letter within 15 working days of receipt of the appeal, including information about the role of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

5. Monitoring

5.1. The Academic Board will receive an annual report, in December each year, on the operation of the College's complaints procedure, if any complaints are received, and will be alerted to any policy issues arising when necessary. Such reports will not contain any confidential information relating to individual cases.