Quality Management System

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Policy Title

Complaints Policy for Open University Students

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Alternative Format Statement

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Complaints Policy for Open University Students

1.0 Purpose

1.1 Provide a detailed overview of the complaints process for those students studying on an Open University validated programme.

1.2 Ensure that investigation of complaints is fair, transparent and completed within the agreed timeframe.

2.0 Scope

2.1 The policy applies to all students studying on an Open University validated programme, relating to issues and concerns that are not covered by other policies and procedures for Open University Higher Education students at Bishop Auckland College.

2.2 Academic decisions made by Bishop Auckland College's various boards, panels or committees are not in scope of this policy. For issues related to academic matters, please refer to HE Academic Appeals Policy (ref: POL-HE-06).

2.3 This policy applies to claims for compensation resulting from minor damage sustained to the property of an Open University student as a result of negligence on behalf of Bishop Auckland College e.g.in terms of Health and Safety.

2.4 Students must exhaust the Bishop Auckland College internal complaints process before they can escalate their complaint to our Validating Partner, Open University.

2.5 Once the internal BAC process has been exhausted, if the student is not satisfied with the outcome, there is an opportunity for the Open University (OU) to potentially undertake a review. If the OU review process is then exhausted, in some cases there may be an opportunity to escalate to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.6 If at any time an incident of inappropriate behaviour occurs and it is felt that this is a safeguarding allegation against a member of staff, the Policy on safeguarding concerns made about staff, including supply staff, volunteers and contractors (POL-HR-12) must be adhered to.

2.7 As this policy involves processing personal data, data protection regulations will be adhered to. Please refer to the Data Protection Policy (ref: POL-DP-01) for further information.

3.0 References

3.1 Data Protection Policy POL-DP-01

3.2 OIA -The good practice framework: handling student complaints and academic appeals

3.3 The Open University- Handbook for Validated Awards 2024-25

3.4 Policy on safeguarding concerns and allegations made about staff, including supply staff, volunteers and contractors (POL-HR-12).

4.0 Definitions

4.1 **BAC**: Bishop Auckland College
4.2 **APFR**: Assistant Principal for Finance and Resources
4.3 **DoQ & HE**: Director of Quality and Higher Education
4.4 **QAM**: Quality Assurance Manager
4.5 **OfS**: Office for Students
4.6 **OIA**: Office of Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education – operates an independent scheme to review student complaints about HE providers.
4.7 **OU**: Open University
4.8 **HR**: Human Resources
4.9 **IO**: Investigating Officer

5.0 Stage One: Early Resolution / Informal

(Managed by Bishop Auckland College)

5.1 If a student feels that they have reasonable grounds to make a complaint, they must do so in writing within 5 working days of the situation arising. They should raise their concerns via email to quality@bacoll.ac.uk, or by accessing and completing a complaint form within the complaints section of our website here. The quality admin team will acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days.

Note: If a student requires assistance in completing and, or submitting their complaint, they should contact the HE Student Liaison Mentor, or a member of the Quality Administrative Team for support and guidance.

5.2 An attempt will be made to deal with the complaint using an early resolution approach. The QAM will conduct an initial review of the complaint to establish if 'Early Resolution' is possible. They will contact the student in writing within 5 working days following the date of acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint, arranging an appropriate time for discussion.

Note: Early Resolution is designed to address straightforward concerns swiftly and informally, before they are escalated further.

5.3 During discussion with the student, if it is believed that the severity of the complaint would not be able to be addressed using an early resolution approach, the QAM would agree to escalate it to stage 2 – formal.

5.4 The QAM will inform the student of the outcome of the early resolution stage in writing within 5 working days of the discussion.

5.5 Where the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the early resolution stage, or where early resolution is not possible or suitable due to the character, complexity or seriousness of the matter, the issue can be escalated to the next stage. Stage Two: formal complaint (Ref: 6.0).

6.0 Stage Two: Formal Complaint

(Managed by Bishop Auckland College)

6.1 If a student wishes to escalate their complaint to stage two, they must do so by informing the QAM in writing within 15 calendar days of being informed of the outcome of stage one: early resolution.

6.2 Alternatively, the QAM, with the permission of the student, will escalate the complaint to stage two: formal, within 10 working days of the mutual decision that the issue cannot be resolved using an early resolution approach.

6.3 The student will be informed in writing within 3 working days, acknowledging escalation to stage two. Once the student receives this written acknowledgement, it signifies the start of the formal complaint stage.

Note: Where an issue raised affects a number of individuals, those individuals can submit a complaint as a group. It must include the names of each individual student. BAC will ask the group to nominate one individual to act as representative. BAC will communicate only through the representative and expect them to liaise with the other individuals.

Note: Raising a concern anonymously may impede, or completely prevent an appropriate investigation taking place, and any communication of the outcome.

Note: If the complaint is about the QAM if will be forwarded to the Director of Quality and Higher Education.

6.4 The original complaint form and any evidence collated to date, will be forwarded to an appropriate investigating officer within 3 working days of the date of the written acknowledgement.

6.5 The investigating officer will have 15 working days to complete a detailed investigation. During this time, they may contact the student to seek further information, evidence or clarification. They will compile their investigation report and return it to the QAM within a further 5 working days.

6.6 Within 5 working days of receiving the internal investigator's report, the QAM will inform the student of the outcome of the internal investigation.

6.7 The QAM will inform the student that the internal complaints process has been exhausted by issuing a Completion of Internal Procedures Letter (COIP). The letter will make it clear that if the student is not happy with the outcome of the internal complaint process, how they can escalate the issue to stage three, the review stage (ref: 8.0).

7.0 Complaints about a member of staff

Note: If the complaint is regarding the conduct of a member of staff this section runs alongside all aspects detailed within section six. Where this is not the case, please continue to section eight.

7.1 The QAM will forward the complaint to an appropriate leader or manager for further investigation. A copy of the complaint will also be forwarded to Human Resources (HR) for their awareness and reference.

7.2 An appropriate leader or manager (not with direct management of the student or staff member) will undertake an investigation as per the process outlined (ref: 6.5)

7.3 If, it is decided that it is appropriate for the issues raised in the complaint to be referred to a relevant HR Procedure, then all information relating to the complaint, and subsequent investigation will be forwarded by the QAM to HR.

OR

If it is agreed with HR that the complaint has been resolved or it is not necessary to refer the complaint to a HR procedure, the leader or manager will finalise the investigation and respond as per the process (ref: 6.5) to the QAM.

8.0 Stage Three: Review Stage

(Undertaken / managed by the Open University)

8.1 The COIP letter from BAC confirming that the internal complaints process has been completed will inform the student that if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they can access the Open University's Appeals Procedure.

8.2 The student will need to write to the Student Casework Office at the Open University or submit a review form, within 28 calendar days of the date identified on the COIP letter from BAC.

8.3 The OU will have up to 28 working days to respond to the student, providing a report detailing the outcome of the 'review stage'.

Note: further information can be found in the OU Handbook for Validated Awards 2025–26

8.4 Once the student has exhausted stage three: the review stage overseen by the OU, they will receive a Completion of Procedures Letter (COP). They then have a final period of 12 months from the date of the COP to raise a review with the OIA. Both the form and the procedures are available on the OIA website (www.oiahe.org.uk).

9.0 Complaint Process Overview

Stage	Who manages it	Student action	College/OU response
Stage 1: Early resolution	BAC QAM	Submit complaint within 5 days of the situation arising	Acknowledgement within 3 working days; discussion, outcome in writing within 5 working days of the discussion
Stage 2: Formal complaint	BAC QAM / IO	Escalate within 15 calendar days of stage 1 outcome	Acknowledgement within 3 working days; Formal investigation and written outcome (COIP letter issued) within 25 working days of acknowledging the complaint
Stage 3: OU review	Open University	Submit to OU within 28 calendar days of COIP letter	OU review response
OIA	OIA	Submit within 12 months of COP where eligible	Independent review

Contact Information

For questions or feedback regarding this policy, please contact:

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Summary of significant changes

For information about changes made to this Policy see the Change log found on our website.