UCQ UNIVERSITY CENTRE QUAYSIDE

Complaints Procedure

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Due for review: 18/09/2028

Commitment Statement

Board of Governors and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) at University Centre Quayside (UCQ) are committed to ensuring all policies and procedures are fully implemented across the organisation.

This Complaints policy will be regularly updated, particularly as the business changes in nature and size, and reviewed periodically and in accordance with regulatory legislation.

Policies will be communicated to all employees, including to new employees during their induction period.

Signed: Date: 18/09/2026

Position: Principal & CEO

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1. Context and purpose

This procedure sets out University Centre Quayside's (UCQ) arrangements for receiving, investigating and responding to complaints.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more individuals about something UCQ has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of UCQ.

UCQ considers complaints to be an important source of feedback and an opportunity to identify improvements to its services and practices.

This procedure applies across UCQ and may be used by students, apprentices, applicants, staff and other stakeholders where there is no more appropriate procedure for considering the matter.

Where a complaint relates to an employment matter raised by a member of staff, the relevant staff grievance or other employment procedure will normally apply. Where a complaint concerns a matter governed by another specific UCQ procedure, UCQ may determine that the matter should be considered under that procedure instead.

For students, matters relating to academic judgement, progression, assessment or awards will normally be considered under AC-001 Appeals Procedure rather than this Complaints Procedure.

2. Principles

UCQ will seek to resolve complaints fairly, proportionately and as promptly as possible.

Complainants will not suffer disadvantage as a consequence of raising a complaint in good faith.

Complaints will be handled impartially, objectively and with an appropriate level of confidentiality. Information will only be shared with those who need it for the purposes of considering, investigating or responding to the complaint.

Individuals involved in investigating or reviewing a complaint must not have had material prior involvement in the matter and must declare any actual or potential conflict of interest.

Reasonable adjustments will be made where appropriate to enable individuals to access and participate in the procedure.

All formal complaints and their outcomes will be recorded. UCQ will use information arising from complaints to identify themes, areas of good practice and opportunities for improvement.

Where a complaint raises matters that may need to be considered under another UCQ policy or procedure, including safeguarding, disciplinary, harassment or sexual misconduct procedures, UCQ may refer all or part of the matter to the appropriate process. The complainant will be informed where appropriate.

3. Help, advice and representation

Individuals can obtain this procedure in alternative formats and seek help, advice and guidance about making a complaint by contacting UCQ.

A complainant may be accompanied or supported during the complaints process where appropriate. UCQ may also make reasonable adjustments to the way in which a complaint is submitted or considered.

Students may seek independent advice and support where this is available to them.

4. Stage 1 – Informal or early resolution

Where appropriate, a complainant should first seek to resolve their concern informally with the member of staff or area responsible for the matter.

The complaint should normally be raised as soon as possible and no later than 28 calendar days after the event or issue giving rise to the complaint.

The complainant should explain the nature of their dissatisfaction, provide relevant information or evidence where appropriate, and explain what they consider UCQ could reasonably do to resolve the matter.

UCQ will normally respond within 14 calendar days.

Where the matter is particularly serious, complex or sensitive, or where informal resolution would not be appropriate, UCQ may permit the complainant to proceed directly to Stage 2.

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, or has not received a response within the expected timeframe, they may submit a formal complaint under Stage 2.

5. Stage 2 – Formal complaint

5.1 Lodging a formal complaint

A formal complaint should normally be submitted within 28 calendar days of the outcome of Stage 1.

The complainant should:

- explain the nature of the complaint and, where Stage 1 has been undertaken, why the matter remains unresolved;
- identify the outcome or remedy they are seeking;
- provide any relevant evidence; and
- identify any other person who may hold relevant information.

Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the Complaints Officer at **complaints@ucq.ac.uk**. Where reasonable adjustments are required, UCQ may agree an alternative method of submission.

The Complaints Officer will acknowledge and log the complaint, normally within one working day, and arrange for it to be considered by an appropriate person who has no material conflict of interest or prior involvement.

5.2 Investigation

The investigating person will consider the information and evidence available and may request further information from the complainant, relevant members of staff or other individuals.

Interviews or meetings may be undertaken where this is considered necessary and proportionate.

The investigation will be conducted impartially and the complainant will be given a reasonable opportunity to explain their complaint and provide relevant evidence.

Where a complaint raises several issues which fall under different procedures, UCQ will determine how those matters should most appropriately be considered and will explain this to the complainant.

5.3 Timescales

UCQ will seek to complete the formal complaint process as promptly as reasonably practicable.

For complaints made by students on OU-validated higher education programmes, UCQ's Stage 2 process, including any internal review requested under section 7, will normally be completed within 41 calendar days of receipt of the formal complaint.

Where there are good reasons why a complaint cannot be concluded within the applicable timeframe, the complainant will be informed of the reasons for the delay and kept updated on progress and any revised timeframe.

5.4 Formal outcome

The formal complaint may be:

- upheld in whole;
- upheld in part; or
- not upheld.

The complainant will receive a written outcome explaining the decision, the reasons for it and, where the complaint has been upheld in whole or in part, any remedy or action UCQ intends to take.

The outcome will also explain the complainant's right to request an internal review under section 7, the grounds for doing so and the applicable timeframe.

6. Remedies and action arising from complaints

Where a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, UCQ will consider an appropriate and proportionate remedy.

This may include, where appropriate, an apology, correction of an error, reconsideration of a decision, action to improve a service or process, or other reasonable steps to address the impact of the matter complained about.

A complaint concerning another person's conduct will not necessarily entitle the complainant to receive confidential information about disciplinary or other action taken in relation to that individual.

7. Internal review within UCQ

A complainant who considers that their formal complaint has not been properly considered may request an internal review by the Chair of Board of Governors or an appropriate nominee who has not previously been involved in the matter.

A request must normally be submitted within **7 calendar days** of notification of the formal outcome and must explain the grounds on which the review is sought.

A review may be requested where:

- there was a material procedural irregularity in the consideration of the complaint;
- the outcome was unreasonable in light of the evidence considered; or
- new evidence is available which could reasonably have affected the outcome and which could not reasonably have been provided at the formal stage.

The review is not normally a reinvestigation of the original complaint. Its purpose is to determine whether the formal process was properly and fairly conducted and whether the outcome was reasonable.

The reviewer may uphold the original decision, vary the decision or remedy, or require all or part of the complaint to be reconsidered.

The complainant will normally be notified of the outcome of the review within 7 calendar days.

For complaints from students on OU-validated higher education programmes, this internal review forms part of UCQ's Stage 2 process and is included within the overall 41-calendar-day timeframe referred to in section 5.3. It does not constitute the Stage 3 review undertaken by The Open University.

Following completion of the internal review, there will be no further internal right of review within UCQ.

8. Completion of UCQ's internal procedures

Once there are no further internal steps available under this procedure, UCQ will confirm that its internal procedures have been completed.

For students, UCQ will issue a Completion of Procedures (COIP) letter where required.

The letter will identify any applicable external or awarding-body route available to the student.

The appropriate next step will depend upon the individual's status, programme of study and the nature of the complaint. The availability of one external route should not be taken to mean that the same route is available to every person using this procedure.

9. Complaints relating to an Open University-validated programme – Stage 3

For students studying on a programme validated by The Open University, there is a further right to request a review by The Open University where:

- the complaint relates to an OU-validated programme;
- UCQ's internal procedures have been exhausted; and
- there are reasonable grounds to believe that UCQ's procedures for dealing with the complaint were not implemented correctly or fairly.

For the purposes of the OU complaints framework:

Stage 1 is UCQ's informal or early resolution process under section 4.

Stage 2 is UCQ's formal complaints process under sections 5–7, including UCQ's internal review where requested.

Stage 3 is review by The Open University.

Following issue of UCQ's COIP letter, the student will have **21 calendar days from the date of the COIP letter** to submit a request for review by The Open University.

The Open University Stage 3 review is an awarding-body review and is separate from UCQ's own internal review.

10. Other awarding and funding organisations

Where a complaint concerns services received in connection with a programme or qualification awarded by an organisation other than The Open University, the complainant may have a right to escalate the matter to the relevant awarding organisation once UCQ's internal procedures have been exhausted.

Students or apprentices should refer to the information relating to their particular programme or contact UCQ for guidance.

Where applicable, further routes may also be available through a relevant funding or regulatory organisation.

11. Office of the Independent Adjudicator

UCQ is a member of the independent Scheme operated by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

An eligible student who has completed the applicable internal and, where relevant, awarding-body procedures may be able to ask the OIA to independently review their complaint.

The OIA normally requires a complaint to be submitted within **12 months of the date of the relevant Completion of Procedures Letter**.

The OIA route applies only where the individual and complaint are eligible under the OIA's Rules.

12. Office for Students Freedom of Speech Complaints Scheme

The Office for Students (OfS) operates a free speech complaints scheme. Under that scheme, the OfS can review complaints about freedom of speech from non-student members, staff, applicants for academic posts and actual or invited visiting speakers. The scheme is free to use.

Information about the complaints that the OfS can review is available on the OfS website.

The OfS scheme is not a student complaints scheme. Students should use the applicable UCQ complaints or appeals procedure and may, where eligible, have access to external review by the OIA.

13. Transitional arrangements

Complaints submitted before the implementation date of this version of the Procedure will continue to be considered under the version of the Procedure in force at the date the complaint was submitted.

The applicable timescales, including the timeframe for requesting a review by The Open University, will remain those set out in that version of the Procedure.

14. Monitoring and review

UCQ will maintain appropriate records of formal complaints and reviews and will monitor complaints to identify recurring themes, areas of risk and opportunities for improvement.

Relevant themes and actions will be reported through UCQ's governance arrangements as appropriate.

The procedure will be reviewed periodically and following significant changes to applicable regulatory, awarding-body or external requirements.

15. Document history

ISSUE NO.	DATE	PAGE	REVIEWER	DETAIL OF AMENDMENT
10	18/09/2026	All	Tara Henderson	Periodic review completed. Document completely revised to reflect updated Open University requirements and the introduction of the OfS Freedom of Speech Complaints Scheme. Scope and applicability clarified to confirm the procedure covers students, apprentices, applicants, staff and other stakeholders. Complaint stages and responsibilities clarified, including the distinction between UCQ's internal review process and the OU Stage 3 review for OU-validated provision. Formal Stage 2 timeframe updated to 41 calendar days for OU-validated HE complaints, and the timeframe for requesting an OU review reduced from 28 to 21 calendar days. Transitional arrangements added for existing cases, together with updated external

				escalation information covering the OIA and OfS Freedom of Speech Complaints Scheme.

16. Initial equalities impact assessment

Department	All
Completed by	Tara Henderson, Head of Policy & Governance
Date of initial assessment	20/03/2021
Date of latest review	18/09/2026
Area to be assessed	AC-002 Complaints Procedure
Existing or new policy/procedure	Existing
What evidence has been used to inform the assessment and policy?	**External guidance and requirements:** OIA Good Practice Framework: Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals; QAA UK Quality Code and relevant guidance on concerns, complaints and appeals; Open University Validation Partnerships Guidance: Complaints and Academic Appeals, Version 1.0, June 2026; Office for Students Freedom of Speech Complaints Scheme Rules and associated guidance. **Internal guidance and requirements:** UCQ Equality and Diversity Policy; relevant UCQ governance requirements and consultation through the appropriate UCQ approval process.

1. Describe the aims, objectives or purpose of the policy/procedure

This procedure sets out UCQ's arrangements for receiving, investigating and responding to complaints.

It applies across UCQ and may be used by students, apprentices, applicants, staff and other stakeholders where there is no more appropriate procedure for considering the matter. The procedure provides routes for informal or early resolution, formal investigation, internal review and, where applicable, escalation to an awarding, regulatory or external review body.

The procedure is intended to ensure that complaints are considered fairly, impartially, proportionately and within clear timescales, and that complainants are not disadvantaged as a consequence of raising a complaint in good faith.

2. Which stakeholders/groups are intended to benefit from this policy/procedure?

All stakeholders, including students, apprentices, applicants, staff and other individuals who engage with UCQ and may need to raise a complaint.

3–5. Assessment of protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Negative impact	How the procedure furthers or prevents the aims of the Equality Act	Can any negative impact be justified?
Age	No effect	The procedure applies consistently regardless of age and provides a fair and transparent route for raising and resolving complaints.	Not applicable
Disability	No effect	The procedure allows for alternative formats, support and reasonable adjustments where appropriate to ensure disabled individuals are able to access and participate in the complaints process.	Not applicable
Sex	No effect	Complaints are considered impartially against the circumstances and evidence of the individual case, irrespective of sex.	Not applicable
Gender reassignment	No effect	The procedure provides equal access to the complaints process and requires complaints to be handled fairly, impartially and confidentially.	Not applicable
Marriage and civil partnership	No effect	The procedure applies consistently irrespective of marriage or civil partnership status.	Not applicable
Pregnancy and maternity	No effect	The procedure applies consistently and allows reasonable flexibility and adjustments to participation where individual circumstances require this.	Not applicable
Race	No effect	The procedure provides equal access to complaint and review mechanisms regardless of race and requires matters to be considered objectively and impartially.	Not applicable
Religion or belief	No effect	The procedure applies consistently regardless of religion or belief and provides an impartial mechanism for addressing concerns, including where relevant concerns relate to discriminatory treatment.	Not applicable
Sexual orientation	No effect	The procedure provides equal access and requires complaints to be considered fairly, confidentially and without discrimination.	Not applicable

Overall assessment: No disproportionately negative impact on any protected characteristic has been identified. The revised procedure contains safeguards intended to support equitable access, including alternative formats, reasonable adjustments, support, impartial investigation and an internal review mechanism.

6. Has there been any consultation/engagement with the appropriate protected characteristics?

No specific consultation with protected characteristic groups was considered necessary as no disproportionately negative impact has been identified.

The procedure has been reviewed against relevant equality, regulatory, awarding-body and external good-practice requirements and will remain subject to ongoing review through UCQ's governance arrangements.

7. What action(s) will you take to reduce any disproportionately negative impact, if any?

None required.

UCQ will continue to make reasonable adjustments and provide appropriate support where individual circumstances require this. Equality implications will continue to be considered through monitoring and periodic review of the procedure.

8. Should this policy/procedure proceed to Full Impact Assessment?

No.

No high or disproportionately negative impact on any protected characteristic has been identified.

Assessor signature:	**Approved by:** **Michelle Elliott**	**Date approved:** 18/09/2026