

Staffordshire University Complaints: Guidelines for Investigating Officers

These guidelines are intended to support staff to carry out proportionate, fair and transparent investigations into student concerns. The guidelines take account of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Good Practise Framework on Complaints and Appeals (2016) and the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Concerns, Complaints and Appeals (2018).

Investigating Officers should approach their role positively, seeing the investigation as an opportunity to put right anything which may have gone wrong and to build a positive relationship with the student. Following the below principles will support staff to do this.

Objectivity

Investigating Officers should have no previous direct dealings with the complainant and should not be involved in the situation giving rise to the complaint. If a complaint is made about a member of staff, it is important that there is no direct relationship between the staff member complained about and the Investigating Officer, for example a line management relationship. Normally, the Investigating Officer will be a more senior role holder than the subject of the complaint.

Timescales

The University seeks to resolve student concerns at the earliest opportunity because this maximises the potential for a successful resolution. Sometimes lengthy investigations can limit the scope for the University to put things right, for example if an investigation goes beyond a progression point. Complaints investigations should not become a grievance in themselves so Investigating Officers will need to respond as quickly as possible and within the timescales outlined in the Complaints and Appeals Procedure (Appendix A).

Communication

The Investigating Officer will make an initial assessment of the complaint. In doing so they will normally meet with the complainant to fully understand the complaint and to explain the scope of the investigation. If the requested outcome is not practical or proportionate, the Investigating Officer should sensitively manage the student's expectations from this early stage.

The Investigating Officer should also keep the complainant reasonably informed about progress in the investigation and likely timescales.

Fairness

The Investigating Officer should give the student reasonable notice of any meeting, keeping in mind the overall timescales of the Complaints and Appeals Procedure. The complainant should

be offered the opportunity to bring a representative along to the meeting. This is limited to a fellow student or member of the Students' Union.

Should any member of staff be required to give evidence or respond to a complaint, again reasonable notice should be provided of any meeting, keeping in mind the overall timescales of the complaints procedure. The member of staff should be offered the opportunity to be accompanied to the meeting by a member of staff or trade union representative. Should the Investigating Officer determine that the member of staff will be required to comment on specific and substantiated allegations within the complaint, these should be sent to the member of staff in advance of the meeting. It is acknowledged that some staff may find the process difficult and may experience some anxiety. Staff may be referred to Right Management, the employee assistance programme, for available support.

Transparency

Investigating Officers should keep a record of any meetings taking place, including the date of the meeting and those in attendance. The record of the meeting does not have to be a word for word transcript but should contain sufficient detail to accurately capture the key points of the discussion. Any documentation which the Investigating Officer is relying on in reaching a conclusion should be retained and submitted with the report. Any documentation arising from the investigation, could be requested by the student through a Subject Access Request, or by the OIA, and therefore should be professional and limited to the scope of the complaint.

Evidence-Based Decision Making

Any disputed or indeterminate facts should be considered by the Investigating Officer on the balance of probabilities. Any conclusions reached by the Investigating Officer should be reasonable in view of **all** of the circumstances. This means that Investigating Officers should not be selective in the facts that they refer to and should demonstrate that all of the issues have been considered.

If the Investigating Officer is not able to reach a finding of fact on the balance of probability, the report should clearly state this, explaining the reason why.

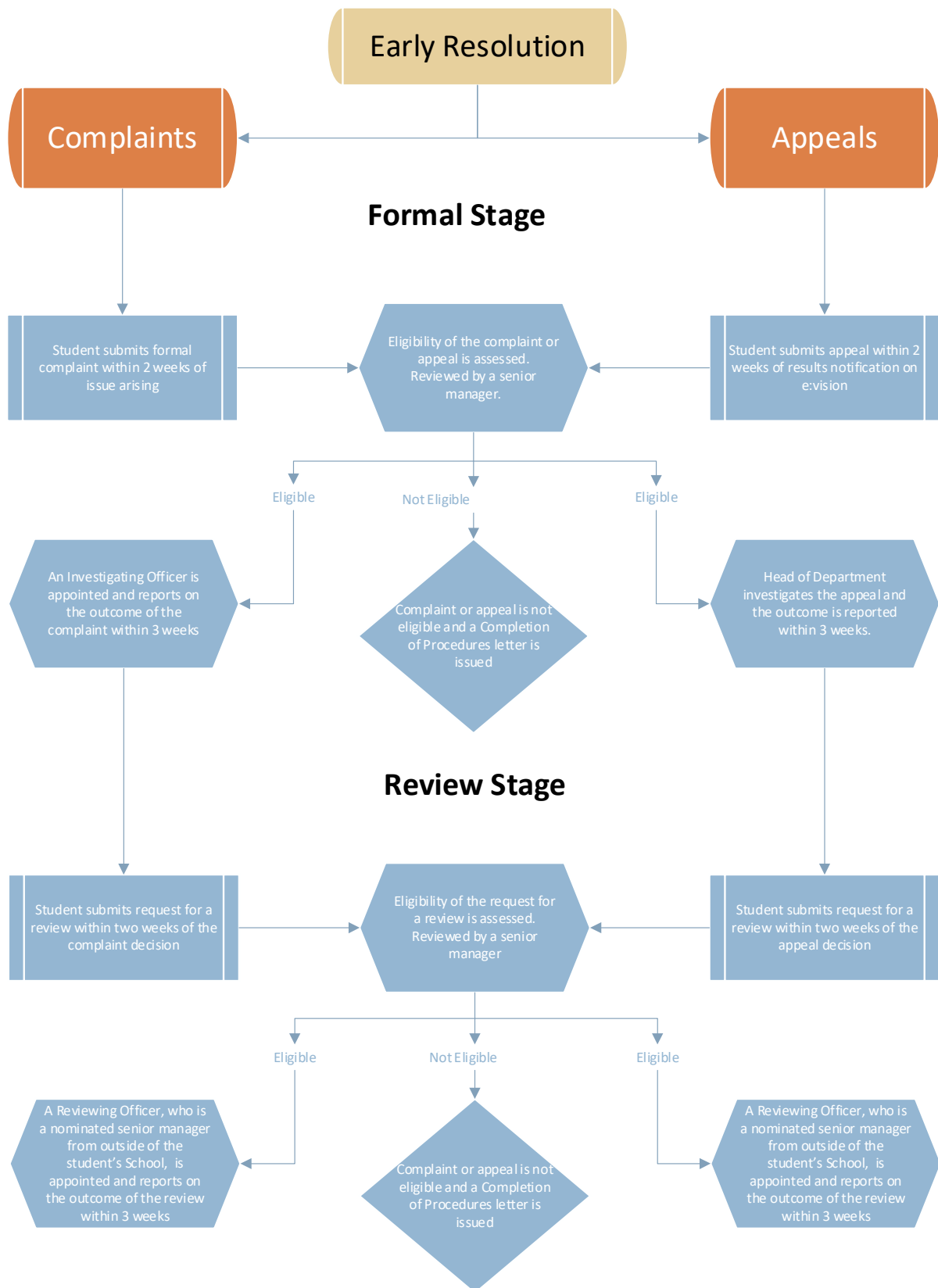
The Investigation Report template (Appendix B) guides the Investigating Officer to clearly document the process of their investigation, conclusions and recommended outcomes.

Creative and Student Focused Outcomes

Investigating Officers may recommend one or more outcomes to remedy a complaint and should refer to Putting Things Right: Staffordshire University Guidelines on Complaints Outcomes.

Complaint outcomes should be creative and student focused. They should aim, where possible, to return the student to the position they were in before the circumstances giving rise to the complaint. Outcomes should offer a practical way forward for the student and, if necessary, serve to re-build, the relationship between the student and school or service complained about.

Complaints and Appeals Procedure





Staffordshire University
Complaints Investigation Report

Report into the Complaint of:

Investigating Officer:

Date of the Report:

Summary of the Complaint:

Information Gathered:

Meetings Held:

Meeting With	Date	Notes Appended
		Yes/No
		Yes/No
		Yes/No

Conclusions:

Appendix B

Proposed Outcome:

Please refer to **Putting Things Right: Staffordshire University Guidelines on Complaint Outcomes**

Practical Outcomes:

If a practical outcome is not reasonable or sufficient, and a financial outcome is recommended, please include a rationale below:

I can confirm that this is an accurate record of my investigation and I consent for the report to be made available to the complainant/s.

Report to be sent to: regulations@staffs.ac.uk