

Heriot-Watt University's Mapping to the UK Quality Code

Concerns, Complaints and Appeals

Contents

Regulatory contexts for the Quality Code

Terminology

Expectations and Practices

Guiding principles (with mapping from HWU practices)

Regulatory contexts for the Quality Code

The Expectations and Core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) are mandatory for higher education providers in all parts of the UK. Common practices are mandatory in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and while providers in England may choose to work towards them, they are not required to do so as these are not regulatory requirements and will not be assessed as part of the OfS's regulatory framework. National regulators and QAA are not bound by the information in this advice and guidance and will not view it as containing indicators of compliance. This guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

Terminology

Providers use the terms 'concerns', 'complaints' and 'appeals' in their own systems and processes and are free to define these terms as they see fit. For the purposes of this document, we define these three terms, and others used in this area, as follows:

Concern: Where a student makes comment (in conversation, writing or via social media) on the provision of learning opportunities made available, or for any service that the provider may offer. When raised by a student this is often the starting point for what may become a complaint if left unaddressed. This guidance does not cover the QAA Scotland [Concerns Scheme](#) (where issues around a provider's management of academic standards, quality of learning, and information arise) nor the Office for Students [notifications and concerns](#) process.

Complaint: A specific query about an aspect of experience of the provider. This guidance focuses on complaints about the quality of a student's learning opportunities, although the principles can be applied to almost all complaints.

Appeal: A request for a review of a decision of an academic body around a mark, outcome or decision. Students may appeal an outcome on the basis of evidence or procedure, but not on the basis of disagreement with academic judgement.

Students: Current students on a course of study, recent former students and graduates (as defined by the provider's regulations), and people applying for a place at a higher education provider.

Expectations and Practices

The advice underneath the Expectations and Practices is not mandatory for providers but illustrative of a range of possible approaches.

This Theme gives guidance on concerns, complaints and appeals and how the ability of, and processes for, someone to raise their dissatisfaction promotes equality of opportunity and the rights of all students to benefit from a high-quality academic experience, and to access the support they need to succeed. Providers are encouraged to consider concerns, complaints and appeals as an open opportunity to address and enhance their provision, learning opportunities, public information and management of the information held within their institution.

EXPECTATIONS FOR QUALITY

Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

- *A student's experience of their course is a complex interaction of their expectations, the information they have received before and during the course, and their experiences. A student may have experiences that lead to either complaints or appeals around this area.*

From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

- *Handling concerns, complaints and appeals is a very challenging area, both with regards to ensuring individual requirements are understood and met and establishing a model of working in partnership with the student to achieve this aim.*

HWU is able to confirm that it meets the above Expectations for Quality. Reference should be made to the detailed mapping provided against each of the Guiding Principles below, as well as the mapping documents to the 'Course Design and Development', 'Research Degrees', 'Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access' and 'Enabling Student Achievement' themes.

Core Practice

1. **The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.**

In practice, this means that providers have formal mechanisms for handling complaints and appeals.

Common Practice

1. **The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.**

In practice, this means that providers ensure impartial investigation of student concerns, complaints and appeals by having investigating officers with an appropriate level of separation from day-to-day operational managers and decision-makers within the provider (or its collaborative partners). They regularly review and enhance assessment policies, procedures and processes as they relate to quality to ensure they remain fit for purpose and take account of changing circumstance, demands and pedagogical developments. Providers have formal mechanisms in place for learning from concerns, complaints and appeals.

HWU is able to confirm that it meets the above Core and Common Practices (Quality). Reference should be made to the detailed mapping provided against each of the Guiding Principles below, as well as the mapping documents to the 'Student Engagement', 'Learning and Teaching', 'Enabling Student Achievement and 'Monitoring and Evaluation' themes.

Guiding Principles with Mapping from HWU Practices

A 'Reference' document is available to use in conjunction with this mapping document.

The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are a concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector, based on the experience of a wide range of providers. They are intended as a framework for providers to consider when establishing new or looking at existing higher education provision. They are not exhaustive and there will be other ways for providers to meet their requirements.

Guiding Principles (Standards and Quality)	Heriot-Watt University Practice
<p>1. Concerns, complaints and appeals are used to improve the student experience. Providers improve the student experience systematically by learning from their processes, and other bodies' decisions and guidance, sharing this learning where appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University is in the process of revitalising the team involved in managing concerns, complaints and appeals to ensure greater coverage and introduction of a case management system. This will be in place from 2020 and this quality code mapping exercise will be a blueprint for ensuring best practice and compliance is at its heart. • In terms of policies and procedures which apply to concerns, complaints and appeals, the following are in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Academic Appeal Policy and Procedures • Complaints Policy • Complaints Policy & Procedures: A Guide for Students • Ensuring Academic Rigour in Assessed Work Policy • Student Discipline Policy and Procedure: • Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedures • The University formally records appeals and complaints through Sharepoint logs for each area (eg complaints) and shared folders (eg SharePoint, OneDrive). This is done at various levels (eg School, Service and University levels). Each of the logs and shared areas are restricted access; a School or Service can only view its own cases and can only edit those for which it is directly responsible (ie Stage 1). Only the Student Conduct Officer and a member of their team can edit University level records (ie Stage 2 cases). The logs contain mandatory fields with drop-down lists to ensure that required information for reporting is recorded systematically, actions and outcomes are recorded consistently and that reporting data can be compared year on year. Students are identified in the logs as this is necessary for monitoring progress on each case, but all data is anonymised in reviews and reports. • Outcomes are reviewed and analysed based on data drawn down from the Sharepoint logs; issues are addressed both individually (eg the outcome of a Stage 2 complaint is shared with a School in order for it to deal with issues raised) and across the University, with the University Complaints Officer or Student Conduct Officer asking Schools/Services to implement recommendations and best practice. These are also picked up in the annual reports to the Senate, which pull together learning points from that academic year, and in the quarterly complaints reports to the Professional Services Leadership Board. • Senior Management are involved the analysis and reporting process on an annual basis. The University systematically provides annual reports to the Senate and quarterly reports to Professional Services Leadership Board on complaints, academic appeals, academic misconduct and non-academic misconduct. This process includes sharing summaries of actions with staff and student representatives at all campuses. Feedback and enhancements are both recommended, and sought, based on evidence. The Pan-University Dean also works in partnership with the Student Conduct Officer and other senior management regarding the handling of concerns, complaints and appeals. This is often in light of other bodies' decisions and guidance which impact on the Universities internal procedures (eg Universities UK; SPSO). For example, when the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) makes recommendations based on any complaints or appeals it considers, the University's Academic Registrar considers the report and puts in place enhancements based on the evidence; these are then taken forward operationally with Schools and Services, by the Student Conduct Officer. The Student Conduct Officer has regular meetings with Schools about trends and specific cases and email communication as necessary regarding immediate required changes to processes and procedures. • There are annual reviews with those involved in concerns, complaints or appeals to ensure that a consistent approach to investigating and recording outcomes are in place across the University. This is the case at all campus locations. • Effective partnership working with the Student Union Advice Hub (Scotland) is used to improve the student experience. For example, policy and process development and dissemination takes place effectively through this channel which are based on students' experience. The University works collaboratively with its student representatives and has formal induction meetings with new officers involved in considering disciplinary cases and semester meetings with representatives to discuss issues and possible campaigns. • Appropriate staff are encouraged to engage in training offered externally. This is largely confined to those involved in managing stage 2 appeals and complaints but with the forthcoming revitalisation of the team, this will expand to those new members of staff involved in managing concerns, complaints and appeals. The Student Conduct Officer has attended training sessions offered by the SPSO and regularly attends the Scottish Higher Education Complaints Forum and the Discipline Forum, which provide opportunities to share best practice and discuss trends and issues (as do the circulation lists associated with each Forum). Workshops and training offered by Universities UK and the Westminster Higher Education Forum have also been useful.

<p>2. Concerns, complaints and appeals procedures are accessible and inclusive. Procedures are clear, accessible, inclusive, flexible and reviewed regularly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear roles and responsibilities for dealing with concerns, complains and appeals, at both internal, and, where necessary, external organisations, are detailed within the relevant policies and procedures (outlined at Guiding Principle 1). Schools will lead on Stage 1 concerns, complaints and appeals. Where a complaint, appeal or concern involves more than one School and/or Service, the lead will be agreed for the individual case and usually the lead being taken by the School or Service responsible for the most significant issue. • Students can have their complaint, appeal or concern recorded by the Student Conduct Officer if necessary (eg if they do not have sufficient digital literacy skills); this will then be forwarded on for consideration as appropriate. • The Student Academic Appeal Policy and Procedures document is accessible and inclusive and has been developed based on sector guidance and engagement with colleagues and students across the University. The Policy and Procedures are publically available to all students and apply to every Heriot-Watt University student equally. The online document has embedded hyperlinks which enables students and staff easy access to the appropriate sections. The policy and procedures have clear definitions and categories of what, for example, normally constitutes grounds for academic appeal. Timescales and stages of appeals are documented clearly as well as a flow chart detailing the process. Students are able, and indeed encouraged, to have accompanying representatives with them in any University Disciplinary Committee (UDC) hearings provided notice is provided to the Student Conduct Officer. Effective notes are produced and provided in written evidence to all parties including students in a timely manner. • The Complaints Policy and accompanying guidance document for students, are accessible, inclusive, publically available and apply to every Heriot-Watt University student equally; they were developed using sector guidance and involved engagement with colleagues and students across the University. The guidance document is designed to help students and staff easily access the information they require, with web links to relevant forms at each stage and a 'quick guide' flowchart to simplify the process. • The University normally reviews every <u>policy</u> on a five-yearly basis and this will be prioritised by the responsible Committee (ie Professional Services Leadership Board). The process incorporates consideration of annual reports, learning from casework, feedback from senior management and student representatives as well external agencies from the sector advising the University on best practice. • In terms of raising, and handling concerns, there is an opportunity for a verbal discussion and meetings to be sufficiently recorded across the University. This is also applicable to complaints, academic and non-academic misconduct. Notes of meetings are taken and kept as part of the case work record. If students request a meeting either prior to submitting a complaint, appeal or concern, or after having done so, then this is accommodated. • Each case is considered in line with approved regulations, policies and procedures of Heriot-Watt University which take account of the Equality Act 2010. The University also makes reasonable adjustments where necessary to minimise the impact of students who have specific mental health and/or well-being circumstance. There is multi-team working (eg Health and Wellbeing Services, Academic Registry and Schools) to ensure that specific cases are taken forward sympathetically and to the needs of the student, whilst ensuring due diligence and rigour, in the consideration of each case, to approved policies and regulations. • There is no separate process for concerns or complaints raised through social media but if these were received by such a route, they would be dealt with within the usual complaints process. The Scottish HE Complaints Forum has discussed this with the SPSO at one of the meetings and agreed there is no need for a separate process, just awareness that this is a potential route. • Appropriate staff are encouraged to engage in training offered externally. This is largely confined to those involved in managing stage 2 appeals and complaints but with the forthcoming revitalisation of the team, this will expand to those new members of staff involved in managing concerns, complaints and appeals. The Student Conduct Officer has attended training sessions offered by the SPSO and regularly attends the Scottish Higher Education Complaints Forum and the Discipline Forum, which provide opportunities to share best practice and discuss trends and issues (as do the circulation lists associated with each Forum). Workshops and training offered by Universities UK and the Westminster Higher Education Forum have also been useful.
<p>3. Information is clear and transparent. Providers explain key terms clearly, describe processes and time limits accurately, covering all types of course and partnership arrangements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published information, formal guidance and informal verbal advice is provided in a clear and transparent manner. Students can easily access policies and guidance through student web pages and the Student Portal (myHWU). The definition of 'complaint' and 'appeal' are clearly defined and there is clear information on the processes involved for each. • The complaint and academic appeal procedures clearly set out grounds upon which students can escalate their case to subsequent stage(s) of the process. Deadlines for students to complain or appeal are clearly communicated and reasonable. There is scope to extend the deadlines, which is at the discretion of the University on a case-by-case basis. There is clear guidance on the nature of any evidence required as part of a complaint or appeal. This includes groups of students who are submitting a complaint; there is a process outlined in the complaints policy for submitting a group complaint. Guidance includes signposting students to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) once all internal stages of appeal or complaint have been pursued. This is done in the form of a standard paragraph with the relevant details in the closing of every Stage 2 appeal or complaint letter. • In correspondence with students, the staff responsible for considering complaints and appeals are clearly identified with appropriate contact details provided. • The University aims to manage student expectations appropriately concerning potential outcomes. This comes in email communication to the student advising of any potential delays in providing outcomes to appeals and complaints within published timescales. This is done throughout the process to ensure that communication channels are clear. The Student Conduct Officer also explains to students the procedures that will apply to their specific case. This can be done in person or over the phone and is always followed up with written correspondence. • Providers delivering learning opportunities with others, including Transnational Education, have clear procedures in place that set out which body is responsible for considering concerns, complaints or appeals, and any routes for escalating the case to the awarding body. • The University has a Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy which was published in June 2018. This is owned by the University Secretary through the Director of Governance and Legal Services. This Policy reflects Heriot-Watt University's global operations and applies at all campus locations as well through partners in other jurisdictions. The Policy includes consideration of disclosures in relation to non-UK legislation that may be applicable.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective records are kept on complaints and appeals which are coordinated by the Student Conduct Officer. The University also provides guidance to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) at the end of the University's internal processes.
<p>4. People raising concerns or making complaints or appeals are treated with dignity and respect, and their well-being is properly considered. Students raising issues and staff who are subject to complaints are treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and are supported appropriately.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heriot-Watt University endeavours to treat all its students with dignity and respect at every stage of the process. It is written into policies and procedures and is part of its values as an organisation. For example, the HWU Student Academic Appeal Policy and Procedures state that: <i>students can invoke a fair and transparent process which treats academic appeals consistently, objectively and effectively whilst maintaining academic standards and fairness.</i> The rights of the appellant are always documented and prioritised in considering complaints and appeals. • Appropriate staff are encouraged to engage in training offered externally. This is largely confined to those involved in managing stage 2 appeals and complaints but with the forthcoming revitalisation of the team, this will expand to those new members of staff involved in managing concerns, complaints and appeals. The Student Conduct Officer has attended training sessions offered by the SPSO and regularly attends the Scottish Higher Education Complaints Forum and the Discipline Forum, which provide opportunities to share best practice and discuss trends and issues (as do the circulation lists associated with each Forum). Workshops and training offered by Universities UK and the Westminster Higher Education Forum have also been useful. • Policies and procedures for both complaints and appeals ensure that students raising legitimate issues of concern will be able to do so without risk of disadvantage. Students are signposted to various services who may be able to provide advice and support (eg Health and Wellbeing Services, all campuses, Student Union Advice Hub, Scotland). For students in particular distress, there are appropriate steps in place to contact specialised agencies to help support students. Provision of impartial and unbiased advice and guidance is delivered through these services as well by the Student Conduct Officer through dealings with students and staff involved in these matters. • The Student Conduct Officer provides advice and support to staff involved in working with complaints and anyone who is the subject of a complaint, referring to the University's support services as appropriate (eg HR, Wellbeing). Supporting staff involved in working with complaints (eg resilience training) has been discussed at the Scottish HE Complaints Forum and at some of its associated conferences; discussion of formal provision, such as training, is yet to be had here but it will be picked up as part of the discussion in formation of the Academic Secretariat team. • The University has clear guidance to students about what does not constitute grounds for a complaint or an appeal in the respective policy documents. The Complaints Policy defines vexatious complaints and unreasonable behaviour in relation to complaints made. • Complaints and appeals can be suspended where there is good reason to do so; this is based on best practice within the sector. This is at the discretion of the Student Conduct Officer and considered on a case-by-case basis. • The Student Conduct Officer has regular meetings with Schools about trends and specific cases. • The University, through the Student Conduct Officer and the Pan-University Dean, have appropriate processes in place for identifying and dealing with frivolous or vexatious complaints or other unreasonable behaviour. These are communicated clearly to students through the policy documents as outlined in the links within the first guiding principle. • The University is committed to creating and maintaining a supportive environment which promotes equality of opportunity alongside dignity and respect. This commitment is supported by a number of policies and procedures, including: Equality and Diversity Policy; Dignity at Work; Harassment and Bullying (students); Harassment and Bullying (staff).
<p>5. Concerns, complaints and appeals processes are proportionate and allow for cases to be resolved as early as possible. Providers consider cases thoroughly but proportionately. The required evidence in support of a case, and the decision, is proportionate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University has established processes in place for identifying cases that require immediate action. This is in relation to cases of alleged serious harm, sexual assault and instances where the individual is at significant risk to themselves or others. This is done through effective communication with multidisciplinary teams with prompt person-centred methods, which establishes information and next steps to be taken. Overall, the Academic Registrar has responsibility for this process which is delegated, operationally, to the Student Conduct Officer. The University Disciplinary Committee (UDC) also consider cases of academic misconduct on behalf of the Senate. Appropriate training and support is given to these colleagues involved in handling cases as well as external training and guidance from appropriate bodies (eg Universities UK, Scottish Public Services Ombudsman). • Section 7 of the Discipline Policy sets out the process for cases requiring immediate action. The Student Conduct Officer will usually undertake the investigation in the first instance on behalf of the Academic Registrar and Chair of the University Discipline Committee. The Officer liaises with relevant Services (eg Health and Wellbeing, Safeguarding, Residence Life) to ensure that any potential risks are mitigated – which could include preventative action such as temporary suspension - and appropriate support is provided to the reporting and reported student, witnesses etc. Any preventative or initial disciplinary action is taken based on risk assessment, which may include information and guidance from Health and Wellbeing, the Police etc, and on the balance of probabilities. • In the Student Discipline Policy, it is clearly stated that the University uses the balance of probability as its standard of proof in relation to all types of discipline cases. In outcome letters relating to discipline letters it is again stated that this is the standard by which the decision is taken and, where the student has not admitted an allegation but the University finds it is proven by that standard, the outcome letter sets out the reasons for the University's decision on those grounds/. • At School-level, concerns around academic issues are, in the first instance, attempted to be resolved quickly and proportionately to the satisfaction of both parties. This could be around timetabling clashes, deadlines or issues relating to spaces/resources. For non-academic issues, Professional Service colleagues across the University are also encouraged to resolve issues as they arise. For both of these areas, if there becomes a trend of similar cases, these will be raised formally through appropriate committees to be considered. • Students who are subject to disciplinary investigation (eg Section 7) are signposted to the Student Union Advice Hub and to Wellbeing Support at the time that they are notified of an allegation being made against them. They are usually given 2 working days' notice of any meeting convened under Section 7 in order to allow them time to consult the Advice Hub and/or access Wellbeing Support. Given the high level of demand for the latter service, the Student Conduct Officer will usually ask Health and Wellbeing to prioritise the provision

	<p>of support to such students and/or ask that support is proactively offered if appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At University-level, the Student Conduct Officer encourages cases to be resolved swiftly and, where possible, avoids formal University Discipline Committee (UDC) consideration where the matter is minor and straightforward. Cases can be deferred on the basis of health grounds which is considered by the Student Conduct Officer. • Processes are sufficiently flexible to allow for appropriate action in exceptional circumstances. They explain clearly what constitutes exceptionality without fettering the discretion of decision makers by, for example, setting exhaustive criteria. • Every case is considered thoroughly but proportionately. The policies and procedures outlined in the guiding principle 1, for example submitting complaints or appeals, clearly state that the provision of supporting evidence with the submission form is essential. This ensures that cases are considered thoroughly. For both complaints and appeals, there are two internal stages and a final stage which is external (eg the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman). The University ensures that the evidence required in support of a case is proportionate. For example, if a student cites mitigating circumstances as part of an academic appeal, it is expected that evidence is provided. There are no minimum or maximum documents of evidence prescribed with the onus on the student to provide this documentation. • Decision-makers have the ability to exercise discretion where it is reasonable to do so. However, for academic appeals this is always done by Academic Boards (School for Stage 1), by the Vice-Principal (University for Stage 2 which is devolved to the Student Conduct Officer). For complaints, the Academic Registrar considers all complaints and has the ability to apply discretion where it is reasonable to do so. All cases are considered on a case-by-case basis and take into account relevant factors and if mitigation may have been applied. • The University has clear procedures which outline what does and does not normally constitute grounds for a complaint or appeal to be upheld. In every stage, the University reflects these grounds in the reasons it outlines for the decisions which are taken. • Remedies normally aim to return the student to the position they would have been in, had the failing identified in the complaint not occurred. Where this is not possible, the University considers other suitable remedies. In the case of upheld group complaints or appeals, the University will apply remedies that are consistent but that also take into account each student's individual circumstances. The University uses the Universities UK guidance on compensation and refunds (2018) and the SPSO guidance on redress for complaints. • In constructing complaints and academic appeal outcome letters, there are instances where apologies are offered both in situations where cases have been upheld or not upheld. They are expressed genuinely and acknowledge what has went wrong or had not been done so with due care or diligence. Indeed, they provide the student with an outcome of what the University will do to address this and to minimise this happening again. The University uses the SPSO's guidance on making apologies.
<p>6. Concerns, complaints and appeals procedures are fair and impartial. Procedures follow principles of procedural fairness and are applied consistently. Decision-makers are properly trained and resourced and have no conflict of interest in the matter. Providers give clear, detailed reasons for their decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles of procedural fairness and impartiality are embedded in the complaints and appeals policies and procedures. In cases where students are invited to provide testimony to the University Discipline Committee, students see all the evidence and are given at least ten working days. This is outlined in detail within Section 6.9. It is expected that processes are not, and do not become, adversarial in nature through effective Chairing of the Committee which is expressed throughout the Student Academic Appeal Policy and Procedures. • The University applies its processes fairly and consistently, complying with legislation and taking into account relevant external guidance when reaching decisions. This includes the Equality Act 2010 and associated guidance, guidance from the Competition and Markets Authority and guidance from relevant ombudsman services. The University adheres to the Higher Education Sector's Scottish Complaints Forum to ensure that its processes and decision-making are aligned to best practice. • The Student Conduct Officer is responsible for the operational consideration of all student complaints and appeals across the University. Working within the Registry Services Directorate, there is no conflict of interest in any consideration of Stage 1 complaints and appeals in Schools, so that they can consider each case on its merits. Appropriate training and professional development activities are undertaken by the Student Conduct Officer, members of the University Discipline Committee (UDC) and the Deputy Registrar at a Scottish and UK-level to ensure that the University is aware of cases and trends affecting the HE sector. • Decisions in relation to complaints, appeals and concerns are, at Stage 1, taken by senior professional services staff, based on advice from senior academics where needed. At Stage 2, decisions on complaints are taken by the University Complaints Officer (the Academic Registrar), with advice from senior professional services staff and/or academics as needed. Stage 2 decisions on academic appeals are taken by experienced members of the Academic Registry who have appropriate seniority and are advised by experienced senior academics as necessary. The Pan University Dean/Chair and Deputy Chair, take decisions in relation to major non-academic concerns, which require immediate action under Section 7 of the Discipline Policy.
<p>7. Confidentiality and anonymity are appropriately assured. Information is released only to those who need it to investigate or respond to the case.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints are handled with appropriate levels of confidentiality. Information is only released to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint. No third party will be told more about the investigation than is strictly necessary in order to obtain the information required of them. Similarly, appeals are handled in the knowledge that students' privacy and confidentiality will be respected and that it is only available to those involved in investigating the case. Students are notified in the complaints policy that the University acts in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act (1999) • Collective complaints are managed on a case-by-case basis depending on the nature of the complaint. Such complaints will be managed by one relevant member of staff to ensure consistency of approach and outcome. A collective complaint will be managed in the same way as an individual complaint, in accordance with and as outlined in the University Complaints Policy and Procedures. • In accordance with SPSO requirements, complaints submitted anonymously will be considered if sufficient information is provided to enable the University to investigate further. Where this is not the case, the University may decide to take no further action but may record the complaint in case it becomes evident that corrective action is required. Any anonymous complaint containing serious allegations must be referred to a senior officer of the University. Where members of staff are the subject of an anonymous complaint, the member of staff may wish to seek guidance and support from the University Human Resources department. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by a senior officer of the University. • In the normal course of events, individuals who are the subject of a complaint are entitled to know who has raised a complaint about them and the nature of the complaint. In

	<p>exceptional circumstances and for justifiable reasons related to confidentiality (which must be documented and accepted by the University as reasonable), a complainant may wish to remain anonymous from an individual about whom a complaint is made.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information Governance within the Governance and Legal Services Directorate works collaboratively with Schools and Directorates across the University to promote effective information governance to support University business worldwide and manage information risk to meet relevant legal, regulatory and audit requirements. Additionally there is a suite of policies and guidance materials to support staff and a Data Protection Officer.
<p>8. Concerns, complaints and appeals are resolved in as timely a way as possible. Providers operate reasonable timeframes and allow identification of concerns, complaints and appeals that require swift action. Staff are encouraged to deal with matters informally where appropriate. Students are informed if any delays occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The University's complaints and appeals procedures specify reasonable timeframes for students to submit cases, and make decisions quickly, consistently and with fairness. The procedures clearly set out grounds upon which students can escalate their case to subsequent stage(s) of the process. Deadlines for students to complain or appeal are clearly communicated and reasonable. There is scope to extend the deadlines, which is at the discretion of the University on a case-by-case basis. Where suitable, colleagues are encouraged to deal with cases at a local-level through a variety of means whilst ensuring that academic quality is not compromised. For those cases where informal means are not suitable, students are advised of appropriate channels and timescales for taking forward a complaint of appeal. Students will also be signposted to University and Student Union support services should they need them. The University normally considers cases in accordance with the timescales set out in procedures (see Guiding Principle 3). The University also do not normally exceed any timescales set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to issue a final decision. The University has arrangements in place to progress complaints and appeals, in the case of delays resulting from staff absence (as outlined within the Policy and Procedural documents). The Academic Registrar delegates resource to communicate with parties when this arises, as well as prioritising cases based on level of importance and timescales.

