



# Higher Education Complaints

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1	Initial approval of HE Complaints Policy and Procedure	Dr F. Keissarian	Feb 17
1.1	Updated to include the role of Ada, The National College for Digital Skills	Dr F. Keissarian	Feb 19
2	Updated to include the role of the Awarding Body, The Open University	Dr F. Keissarian	Feb 21
2.1	Timelines added to each formal stage	Dr F. Keissarian	June 22
2.2	Indicative timelines are included to ensure transparency and manage expectations for students and staff	Dr F. Keissarian	March 23
2.5	Updated to include stage 3 review of the Awarding Body, The Open University	Dr F. Keissarian	Oct 23
2.6	Changes to formal timelines	Dr F. Keissarian	Feb 25
3	Scope updated to QAA definition; bullying/harassment redirected. Third-party complaints allowed; right to accompaniment confirmed. Timelines revised; informal resolution encouraged; vexatious complaints addressed; COIP letters issued.	J. Simpson	Sept 25

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## 1. Introduction

At Ada, The National College for Digital Skills, we are committed to providing a high-quality educational experience, supporting our students, staff, and stakeholders with fairness, transparency, and respect. We recognise that, on occasion, concerns or complaints may arise regarding our services, academic provision, or administrative processes.

This Complaints Policy outlines the procedures for raising and resolving complaints in a timely, transparent, and effective manner. It ensures that all complaints are taken seriously, treated confidentially, and addressed impartially, with the aim of promoting continuous improvement within the institution.

Our goal is not only to resolve individual issues but also to learn from them, enhancing the overall quality of our educational and support services. By following this policy, members of our College community can have confidence that their concerns will be heard and addressed appropriately.

## 2. Scope

This policy is to be used to address complaints associated with:

- College Policies, Procedures or Regulations,
- Academic and non-academic services (excluding academic judgement),
- Academic and non-academic facilities such as catering or IT,
- The conduct or actions of a member, or members, of staff,
- Misinformation regarding academic programmes, College support services and facilities.

This policy is not to be used to address:

- Academic appeals/judgement,
- Appeals against disciplinary actions and/or decision,
- Any kind of bullying or harassment,
- Refusal of admission to applicants

### 3. Policy Statement

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint is understood as:

- *“The expression of a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of a learner’s learning opportunities”* (Quality Assurance Agency).
- *“An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about something a provider has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider”* (Office of the Independent Adjudicator).

In practice, this means that a complaint may relate to the quality of teaching, learning opportunities, facilities, services, or any action or omission by the Ada, The National College for Digital Skills that impacts the student experience.

The College is guided by the following principles:

- Complaint handling will be fair,
- The policy and procedure should encourage informal resolution at the local
- level to facilitate early resolution where possible,
- Complaints will be dealt with appropriate seriousness and confidentiality
- All complaints will be thoroughly and objectively investigated,
- Complainants will be treated equally and will not be treated adversely as a

- result of their complaint,
- Every attempt will be made to resolve issues on an informal basis in the first
- instance, without recourse to a formal procedure.

If at any stage the complaint is made the subject of a formal discussion or hearing, student are entitled to be accompanied by a member of staff, fellow student, parent or guardian. If a student intends to bring legal representation to the College, they are asked to notify the College in good time, usually three working days.

## **Eligibility**

This policy applies to all students and apprentices enrolled on a higher education course at Ada, The National College for Digital Skills.

## **Collective Complaints**

Where issues raised in a complaint affect a number of students, those students can submit a 'group complaint'. Where this happens, and to manage the administration and progression of the complaint, we will normally ask the group to nominate one student to act as a group representative.

## **Timescale and service levels**

Complaints should be made without undue delay. The normal time limit for submitting a complaint is within 28 working days after having become aware of the matter that the student or apprentice is dissatisfied with.

Students that have recently left a programme of study may only raise issues of complaint within 28 working days after the conferral of the award or withdrawal from the programme. Students wishing to lodge appeals against assessment board decisions should refer to the Academic Appeals Policy.

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

Complaints should not be vexatious in nature. Where, after proper investigation, there is reason to believe that a complaint is vexatious or motivated by malice, disciplinary action may be taken against the student under the College's disciplinary policy. A Completion of Procedures letter may be issued at this point.

### **Third Party Complaints**

The College recognises that some students may be unable to make a complaint on their own. In these circumstances, complaints brought by permitted third parties, (for example a family member or legal representative) will only be accepted when the student affected has provided written confirmation and the Higher Education Quality and Standards Lead has approved the request. This request can be submitted at the same time as the complaint. Complaints from third parties will not usually be accepted.

Where the College believes students to be communicating through a third party without providing written consent, the College will seek clarification from the complainant that there is no unauthorised third-party involvement. The complaint processes and timescales may be extended while clarification is sought.

## **4. The Procedure**

### **Stage 1 - Informal Resolution**

Individuals should first approach the relevant member of staff, department, or service area directly, explaining the issue clearly and providing any relevant details.

The staff member or department should acknowledge the concern promptly and make reasonable efforts to resolve it informally. This may involve clarifying misunderstandings, providing further information, or taking corrective action where appropriate.

Informal resolution should normally be attempted within [specify timeframe, e.g., 10 working days] of the concern being raised.

The outcome of the informal stage should be communicated clearly to the complainant. Even if the issue cannot be fully resolved informally, this stage ensures that the complainant's concern is formally acknowledged.

If the concern cannot be resolved through this informal process, the complainant may proceed to Stage 2: Formal Complaint, as outlined in this policy

## **Stage 2 – Formal Complaint**

If a concern cannot be resolved through the informal stage, the individual may submit a formal complaint. This stage ensures a structured, transparent process for investigating and addressing complaints that require more detailed attention.

Complaints should be submitted in writing using the designated form or email within ten working days from the outcome of stage 1 – informal resolution, clearly outlining:

- The nature of the complaint
- Relevant dates, locations, and individuals involved
- Any steps already taken to resolve the matter informally
- Desired outcomes or resolution

Ada, The National College for Digital Skills will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days providing information on the next steps and an anticipated



timeline for resolution.

The complaint will be investigated impartially and thoroughly, with relevant staff or witnesses consulted as necessary and all evidence reviewed to ensure a fair assessment.

Following the investigation, a written response will be provided, outlining the findings and any actions taken or recommended, and, where appropriate, remedies or corrective measures will be implemented. The student or apprentice will also receive a completion of internal procedure (COIP).

Ada, The National College for Digital Skills aims to complete this stage within 28 working days of receiving the formal complaint.

### **Stage 3 – Awarding Body Review**

If a student or apprentice remains unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, they have the right to request a Review from the College's awarding body, The Open University (OU). Students and apprentices have 28 calendar days from receipt of the Completion of Internal Procedures (COIP) letter to submit a request for review. The review stage (Stage Three) will be received and managed by the Student Casework Office at the OU. The OU's formal complaints procedures are detailed in section F1.27 and Appendix 1 of [xxx].

The Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) stipulates that the formal and review stages (Stages Two and Three above) should normally be completed within 90 calendar days of the student raising their complaint or academic appeal at the formal stage.

## **Degree Apprentices:**

In addition to the OU review, apprentices may raise issues specifically concerning apprenticeship delivery, apprenticeship funding rules, or provider/employer responsibilities with the Department for Education (DfE). Complaints to the DfE can be submitted via:

- Email: [helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk](mailto:helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk)
- Post: Customer Service Team, Department for Education (Apprenticeship Service) – see current address on GOV.UK

Apprentices must normally have completed the College's internal complaints procedure before contacting the DfE. The DfE investigates complaints about how apprenticeship training is delivered, compliance with funding rules, and provider/employer obligations. They do not handle employment issues such as pay, contracts, or workplace disputes.