



Version Control Statement

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Student Complaints Process

OVERVIEW

Futureworks is committed to providing a high-quality service to its students from first enrolment to graduation. We actively encourage feedback on all aspects of the teaching and learning experience and recognise that there may be occasions when the level of service received falls short of that which might reasonably be expected.

This process sets out the means by which service issues can be resolved in a quick and constructive manner. Specifically, the aims of the Student Complaints Process are:

- to resolve complaints in a timely, effective and fair manner; and
- to resolve complaints as close as possible to the academic or service area in which they arise.

In most cases, it is anticipated that any service issues will be resolved via facilitated discussion with the person(s) concerned, such as a module or personal tutor, or a member of our support staff. Most concerns can be resolved informally and quickly, and should you wish to bring our attention to any aspect of your experience at Futureworks, we encourage you to raise the matter with the appropriate person. For example:

- A concern about your experience within a module can be raised with the Module Leader. Or, if there is a reason why you prefer not to speak to the Module Leader, you can speak to your Personal Tutor or your Programme Leader.
- A concern about Futureworks learning resources can be raised with the Head of Student Affairs.

For some issues, you may consider using the Suggestion Box outside of the Student Advice Centre.

We recognise that there may be occasions when you have cause for complaint about the service you have received, which you feel cannot be resolved informally, or where you have raised the matter with your tutor or a member of support staff but are dissatisfied with the response. Thus, where early resolution of a complaint has not been possible and/or where a concern is of a more complex nature, this process ensures that your concern will be fairly and thoroughly investigated by a relevant senior member of staff, and handled under our formal complaint resolution procedures, as required.

Should any complaint not be satisfactorily resolved through our internal three stage process, students are able to request that their complaint be independently reviewed by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) [www.oiahe.org.uk], the HE sector ombudsman.



SCOPE

The Student Complaints Process covers complaints from any student currently enrolled on a Futureworks degree course. Students who have suspended their studies, or who have been temporarily suspended or excluded from Futureworks may also make a complaint under this process. Former students may also make a complaint under this process, providing this is done within 90 days of leaving their course.

Futureworks recognises that some individuals may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint and, under such circumstances, we will accept complaints brought by a representative of the student, provided personal consent has been given under the requirements of the Data Protection Act. The student must give consent for a representative to act on their behalf and must validate the accuracy of any documentation or evidence submitted by a representative.

Complaints can be raised individually by a single student or collectively by a group of students. Where a complaint is raised collectively, it should include a signed statement from all parties authorising one person to speak on behalf of the group. Note that receipt of a collective complaint does not necessarily indicate that the outcome of the process will be identical for all parties.

Except in exceptional circumstances, anonymous complaints will not be dealt with under this procedure. Anonymous complaints are handled at the discretion of the Vice Principal.

What is a complaint?

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines a complaint as:

“an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about a provider’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by ... the provider.”

A complaint may relate to:

- the quality and standard of service provided by Futureworks, including the provision of teaching and learning;
- failure to provide a service which would reasonably be expected as a student on a course;
- facilities or learning resources deemed to be unsuitable for the prescribed purpose;
- inappropriate behaviour or treatment by a staff member;
- a failure by Futureworks to correctly follow a stated administrative or academic process.

What does NOT constitute a complaint under this process?

There are circumstances in which a student may find themselves dissatisfied with some aspect of their experience whilst on their course, but which do not fall under the Student Complaints Process. Where this is the case, other processes and procedures exist to enable the student to seek resolution to their issue. The following examples would not constitute a complaint under this process:

- a routine, first-time request for a service;
- a matter relating purely to academic judgement (including marks awarded for formative or summative assignments unless on the grounds that appropriate marking procedures were not followed);
- an academic appeal against a decision by an examination board;
- Freedom of Information Act, Subject Access Requests or other Data Protection requests;
- requests for information on Futureworks’ policies or procedures;
- responses to invitations to provide feedback;



- insurance claims;
- attempts to have a complaint reconsidered after final decision has already been reached;
- misconduct relating to research and/or ethical practice;
- challenges to admissions decisions;
- complaints about third parties or other students;
- complaints about matters which have already or are under consideration by the OIA;
- complaints about matters which are under legal review.

Related policies and procedures:

- [Academic Appeals Process](#)
- [Fitness to Study Procedure](#)
- [Student Disciplinary Process](#)
- [Student Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)
- [Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy](#)

Prior to making a complaint, students are strongly advised to seek early resolution from their tutor, personal tutor or from Student Services, as it may be possible to deal with any issues quickly and informally. In all cases, students may wish to seek guidance from Student Services should they be uncertain about which process is the most appropriate for their particular concern.

Complaints about the partner university (UCLan) should be made directly to the university: [UCLan website](#)

TIMESCALES

Futureworks' Student Complaints Process has three stages:

1. Early Resolution [Informal]
2. School/departmental investigation and resolution [Formal]
3. Institutional review and final resolution [Formal]

Complaints should be raised with the most relevant service area or member of staff as soon as possible to ensure prompt investigation and, wherever possible, swift resolution. In all cases, a complaint must be raised within three months of the problem becoming apparent.

Once an outcome has been provided at Stage 1 (Early Resolution), a complainant has 14 calendar days to request that their case be escalated to Stage 2.

Once an outcome has been provided at Stage 2 (Formal departmental investigation), a complainant has 14 calendar days to request that their case be escalated to Stage 3.

A request by a complainant to consider a complaint beyond the above time limits will not normally be granted unless there is evidence that the student was precluded from raising or escalating the complaint within the normal timescales.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality will be preserved during the investigation of a complaint to safeguard the interests of everyone concerned, unless disclosure is necessary to progress the complaint, or where the health and safety of individuals may be at risk.

PROCEDURE



All stages of this procedure are internal proceedings which are intended to be fair and to comply with the rules of natural justice, and the parties involved in complaint proceedings are not expected to adopt an adversarial or overly legalistic stance. An individual who makes a complaint is entitled to be accompanied by a person known to them at any stage of this procedure, such as a friend, colleague or family member. Students who make a complaint may not be represented in their absence, unless there are exceptional reasons (such as a health condition).

Futureworks will ensure that anyone investigating or deciding on a complaint has had no prior involvement in the complaint wherever possible, and will endeavour to carry out these procedures fairly, consistently and impartially. Where a process references a specific office holder (for example, a Head of School), this shall be understood as meaning any nominee acting on behalf of that office holder should it be necessary for that person to exclude themselves from the process (for the reasons above, or due to sickness or other absence).

Each stage of this process is intended to ensure resolution of a student's concerns efficiently and as close to the point of complaint as possible.

At **Stage 1** it is intended that early resolution can be achieved through direct, informal communication with the members of staff concerned. This may include raising issues with module or personal tutors, a Programme Leader, or a member of Student Services. Stage 1 also includes provision for facilitated discussion, which may take the form of a supervised meeting with the relevant parties to try to reach a satisfactory outcome without needing to escalate matters more formally. To make a complaint, students must start at Stage 1 unless there are exceptional circumstances which make it inappropriate to do so.

At **Stage 2** of the process, a formal investigation may be conducted at school/departmental level if the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of proceedings attempted at Stage 1, or if informal resolution was not possible or appropriate due to the complexity or seriousness of the matter.

Stage 3 is the final internal stage, where a member of the senior management team may review a complaint to ascertain whether or not the Stage 1 and 2 procedures were correctly followed, and/or if the decision made at Stage 2 is reasonable and warranted.

While there are three clear stages in the procedure, seeking resolution may potentially be an iterative process within each stage, as each party works to determine a satisfactory outcome.

Stage 1 – Early Resolution [Informal]

The goal of Stage 1 is to attempt to resolve issues as quickly as possible, particularly where concerns are relatively straightforward in nature and/or require little or no investigation.

Complainants are encouraged to raise complaints as soon as they become aware of the problem and to raise it with the academic school, department or appropriate service area in which the incident or problem arose. Concerns may be raised in person, by email, in writing or by phone.

Upon being notified of a concern at this stage, the member of staff will typically consider the following:

- What is the nature of the concern being raised?
- What outcome is the student raising the concern looking to achieve?
- Can the concern can be resolved satisfactorily with minimal investigation required?
- Does the concern relate to one or more areas covered by this process or would another



- process or procedure be more appropriate?
- Does the matter warrant input and/or advice from another member of staff?
- How might the student need to be supported throughout this process?

It is possible that early resolution may be achieved through the provision of an immediate explanation as to why a particular decision was taken, or action occurred. It may be appropriate, in some cases, to make an apology and/or to provide assurance of what will be done to prevent reoccurrence of the issue in the future.

If responsibility for the incident or problem being complained about lies within the staff member's area of work, every effort will be made to resolve the problem at source. If responsibility lies elsewhere, the staff member receiving the complaint will liaise with the relevant area in an attempt to resolve the problem on behalf of the student raising the concern.

If the staff member is not able to resolve or respond to the complaint themselves, they should agree with the appropriate colleague who will assume responsibility for handling the complaint and communicate this to the complainant at the earliest opportunity. The staff member responsible for resolving the Stage 1 complaint will typically keep a note of the resolution offered even if the complaint outcome was provided verbally.

It is anticipated that concerns raised at Stage 1 will typically be resolved within 30 calendar days, although it is hoped that in all cases resolution would be sought as quickly as possible. In exceptional circumstances a short extension of time may be necessary to increase the possibility of resolving the complaint at this stage. Where an extension is required this will be clearly communicated to the student ahead of the end of the 30-day period.

The outcome of the Stage 1 complaint can be communicated to the complainant in person or by phone, however it may be necessary to confirm the outcome by email to the student's Futureworks email address, depending on the nature of the concern raised. Any such response should address the key elements raised in the complaint, along with an explanation for the reasons for the determinations made, including any agreed resolutions.

Stage 2 – School/Departmental Investigation and Resolution [Formal]

In the majority of instances, Stage 2 complaints will already have been considered at Stage 1 (Early Resolution) unless exceptional circumstances warranted escalation directly to Stage 2. The purpose of conducting an investigation is to establish all of the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint, and to provide a full, objective and proportionate response.

This means that in most cases, a Stage 1 complaint will be moved to Stage 2 only when:

- Early resolution under Stage 1 has been attempted, but the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome and takes action to escalate the matter; and
- The concerns raised by the student are sufficiently complex as to warrant a detailed investigation; and
- the implications of the concern raised are likely to be significant.

If a student remains dissatisfied after they have received the Stage 1 (Early Resolution) outcome and wishes to escalate the matter to Stage 2 they must complete a Stage 2 School/Departmental Investigation and Resolution form, which is accessible online [here](#). This form must be submitted to the Head of School or department no later than 14 days after receiving the outcome of the Stage 1 process.



The appropriate person to submit a completed Stage 2 form to is dependent on the nature of the complaint. Concerns of an academic nature, relating to teaching, learning or the course should generally be directed to the appropriate Head of School. Concerns of a pastoral nature, or relating to support services of any kind should be directed to Student Services. If a student is unsure about who they should send their Stage 2 form to, they should seek guidance from the Student Advice Centre.

Position	Name	Email
Head of School (Art & Design)	Ken Lau	ken.lau@futureworks.ac.uk
Head of School (Film, TV & Media)	Richard Hellowell	richard.hellowell@futureworks.ac.uk
Head of School (Sound & Music Production)	Rob Magoolagan	rob.magoolagan@futureworks.ac.uk
Head of Student Affairs	Kate Le Cocq	kate.lecocq@futureworks.ac.uk

In submitting a Stage 2 complaint form the student is expected to provide full details of their concern, the resolution they are seeking and all relevant supporting evidence and documentation. In doing so, students are strongly advised to seek advice and guidance from either the Student Advice Centre or their personal tutor.

In the event that a Stage 2 complaint relates to the actions or activities of more than one school or department, or where there is any potential conflict of interest, the Head of Student Affairs will identify a single individual to take the lead in the investigation and resolution process.

The student will be informed who is investigating each key element of their complaint and a co-ordinated response typically will be provided. In the event that a complaint includes serious allegations of misconduct, it may be that other relevant processes need to be used for investigation and/or determination of the outcome in conjunction with this procedure.

Typically, in consultation with the student (if appropriate), the investigator may consider a number of key questions:

- What are the key elements of the complaint?
- Why were efforts at Stage 1 (early resolution) not successful?
- Was any potential resolution offered at Stage 1?
- What does the student seek to achieve by escalating the complaint to Stage 2?
- Do the student's expectations appear to be reasonable and achievable?
- Has facilitated discussion been attempted?

If the student's expectations appear to exceed what Futureworks may reasonably provide, or are not within Futureworks' power to provide, the complainant should be advised of this as soon as possible in order to manage their expectations about possible outcomes.

Complaints submitted to Stage 2 (School/Departmental Investigation and Resolution) using the Stage 2 form will normally be acknowledge within 7 days, with a full response provided to the student no later than 45 days from receipt of the form and the associated evidentiary documentation.

In cases of exceptional complexity, an investigation may require action and consideration in excess of the above timescale. In such circumstances the student will be informed of the reason for this



along with an estimation of the anticipated length of the delay. If a student feels that the process is being unreasonably delayed, they should seek advice from the Student Advice Centre who can provide assistance in furthering the matter and/or having the case reviewed by the Vice Principal.

The outcome of the Stage 2 investigation will be communicated to the student in writing giving a clear explanation for the determination made on each key element of the complaint and any resolution to the complaint which has been agreed. Once the outcome has been issued, a record will be kept by Futureworks detailing the decision reached and the matter will be considered closed.

Stage 3 – Institutional Review and Final Resolution [Formal]

Where a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation and resolution process, they may request a Stage 3 review by completing the Stage 3 Institutional Review and Final Resolution online form (accessible [here](#)). A request for review at Stage 3 must be received within 14 days of receipt of the written outcome of the Stage 2 process.

In completing the Stage 3 complaint form, the student must include full details of the complaint, and the outcomes of the Stage 2 process. Students are strongly encouraged to seek guidance from the Student Advice Centre or their personal tutor prior to submitting the Stage 3 online form.

A Stage 3 review may only be requested when:

- There is evidence of procedural irregularity or bias at Stage 2;
- The Stage 2 outcome is considered to be unreasonable;
- Material evidence has become available that was not available at Stage 2, and where it would not be appropriate for the lead investigator at Stage 2 to reopen the case.

The Vice Principal will perform an initial review of the complaint to determine whether there are sufficient grounds for the complaint to be considered under Stage 3 and will confirm the outcome of this initial review to the student in writing, usually within 7 days.

Should it be determined that there are sufficient grounds for consideration at Stage 3, the Vice Principal will, in consultation with the student where appropriate, consider the following:

- If the student's expectations exceed the scope of the review;
- If appropriate procedures were followed in the previous stages;
- If the outcomes at the previous stage was reasonable and proportionate;
- If there is any new evidence which needs to be considered;
- If the matter can be resolved through facilitated discussion.

The Vice Principal will review the complaint and provide the student with a written outcome within 45 days from the time that the complaint was received for consideration at Stage 3. In coming to a conclusion about the complaint, the Vice Principal may liaise with the student to attempt to reach a satisfactory outcome.

Where it is not possible to reach an agreement with the student regarding a final outcome, the Vice Principal may constitute a panel of senior colleagues to consider what options remain available for resolution, and to determine the Stage 3 outcome. Should such a panel be convened, no-one involved in the complaint under investigation will be a member of the Panel.

Where there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale for considering a complaint in Stage 3, the Vice Principal will exercise judgement and set time limits on extending the review, notifying the student in writing. The student will be kept updated on the need for any extension and



given a revised deadline for bringing the review at Stage 3 to a conclusion.

If the complainant feels the outcome is being unreasonably delayed they should seek guidance from the Student Advice Centre, explaining why they feel this is the case.

The outcome of the Stage 3 review will be communicated to the student in writing. In line with OIA guidelines, a Completion of Procedures Letter will be issued within 28 days as appropriate. The outcome will include a clear explanation of the determinations made on the key elements within the complaint under review, as well as how any outcomes from the review are to be implemented. The Completion of Procedures Letter issued will advise the student of the right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and the time limit for submission.

Once a decision has been issued a record will be kept by the University detailing the outcome and the complaint will then be closed subject to further external escalation.

INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL REVIEW

Once the Stage 3 review has been completed and an outcome issued to the student, or where it is determined there are insufficient grounds for the complaint to be considered within Stage 3, the student is entitled to ask the OIA to look at their complaint. The OIA considers complaints from students who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of the internal complaints handling procedures and which meet the OIA's eligibility requirements. The complaint must be received by the OIA within twelve months of the Completion of Procedures Letter being issued by the institution. It typically takes a number of months for the OIA to consider a complaint and issue an outcome. Further information about escalating a complaint to the OIA is available on: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Complaint Forms for Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints are accessible online at the following locations:

- [Stage 2 form](#)
- [Stage 3 form](#)

Whatever the nature of the concern, the Student Advice Centre is available to provide students with advice and guidance throughout the complaints process. They can be contacted by email at student.services@futureworks.ac.uk or by phone on 0161 214 4610. Alternatively, students can attend the Student Advice Centre in person, which is located next to the Learning Resource Centre on the third floor at the Riverside campus building.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Student Services support: <https://my.futureworks.ac.uk/login/index.php>

How to make a complaint: <https://my.futureworks.ac.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=13536>

Student Support and Wellbeing, including Counselling Service: <https://www.uclan.ac.uk/students/>

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education: <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>

VEXATIOUS, MALICIOUS AND/OR FRIVOLOUS COMPLAINTS

Although the majority of concerns raised by students are made in good faith, there are occasions where a complaint is made with the intention of causing harm, stress, disproportionate effort and/or reputational damage to Futureworks and its community. If, on receipt of a complaint, it is considered that the complainant is acting in such a manner, the complaint will be referred to the Vice Principal who will determine if it meets any of the following criteria:

- The complaint is without any clear purpose or value; or,



- The complaint is designed to cause disruption and/or annoyance; or,
- The complaint is likely to give rise to disproportionate inconvenience and/or expense; or,
- The complaint is likely to have the effect of harassing Futureworks and/or its staff; or,
- The complaint can be fairly characterised as obsessive and/or manifestly unreasonable; or,
- The complainant is deemed to be intent on doing harm and/or mischief; or,
- The complaint has been made in malice, e.g., it is clear that no redress is sought; or,
- The complaint is not serious or sensible in content, attitude or behaviour; or,
- There is an absence of a clear desire for a sensible or reasonable form of redress.

Where it is judged that a complaint is vexatious, malicious and/or frivolous in nature, the Vice Principal may decide to reject the complaint without full consideration of its merits. If this judgement is reached it will be explained to the complainant, in writing, within 14 days, along with details of why the complaint is considered to be an abuse of process.

The student may appeal against a decision to reject his or her complaint as an abuse of process by writing to the Principal within 14 days of this decision. The Principal will consider the appeal and will notify the student of his or her decision within 30 days. If the original decision is upheld, a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued.

POLICY ON UNACCEPTABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

This policy sets out Futureworks' approach to the relatively few complainants whose actions or behaviour it considers to be unacceptable. For the purposes of this policy, the term "complainant" includes any student or person acting on behalf of a student or who contacts Futureworks in connection with a complaint.

Futureworks understands that making a complaint can be a stressful experience for students, however, it also has a duty to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its staff. Futureworks is committed to dealing with all students fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service, but it does not expect its staff to tolerate behaviour which would be considered to be unacceptable. This includes, for example, any communication which is found to be:

- Abusive, offensive, defamatory or distressing;
- Aggressive, threatening, coercive or intimidating;
- Discriminatory;
- Unreasonably persistent or demanding.

Futureworks will take action to protect its staff from such behaviour, which may include action under the Regulations for the Conduct of Students. Where the behaviour of a complainant is considered to be unacceptable they will be notified of this, and given the opportunity to change it. If the unacceptable behaviour continues the Vice Principal has the right to temporarily impose conditions of contact with Futureworks staff and/or students, restrictions on access to facilities, or other appropriate conditions regarding the complainant's continuance at Futureworks. Any conditions imposed by the Vice Principal will be appropriate and proportionate.

In such circumstances, the Vice Principal will write to the complainant, explaining why their behaviour was considered to be unacceptable, what action has been taken as a result, and the duration of that action. Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is considered to be unacceptable, it may be necessary to terminate contact with them. This may mean that the handling of their complaint is stopped altogether.

Where the behaviour threatens the safety and welfare of Futureworks staff and/or students,



Futureworks will consider other options, including utilising the provisions of the Regulations for the Conduct of Students (including suspension from the campus), reporting the matter to the police, and/or taking other legal action.

OVERSIGHT

Oversight of this process is provided by the Academic Board, and the outcome of this oversight reported annually the Board of Directors.