



Policy/Procedure/Guideline Review

Policy/Procedure/Guideline:	Higher Education Student Complaints Policy and Procedure
Senior Leader Responsible:	Vice Principal Academic
Authors:	Academic Registrar
Approved By:	SLT Board of Corporation
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Publication:	College Website(s) Staff Hub Student Virtual Learning Environment
Changes Made:	<p>Updating, highlighted in the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language considered and aligned to Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Good Practice Framework (GPF) • Update to job titles (throughout) • Definition of a Complaint (5.4): The definition has been broadened to align with the GPF's comprehensive definition: "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". This ensures that a wider range of student issues can be addressed through the complaints process. • Anonymous and Third-Party Complaints (5.5): While still generally not accepted, the policy now incorporates the GPF's nuance that anonymous complaints <i>may</i> be considered for serious issues like safeguarding, with clear explanations of potential limitations, especially regarding the issuance of a Completion of Procedures Letter (CoPL). • Frivolous/Vexatious Complaints (5.6): Enhanced with GPF guidance on due process when terminating such complaints, requiring a written explanation of reasons and detailing the right to appeal and receive a CoPL. • Group Complaints (5.7): The previous strict clauses requiring the whole group to accept/reject an outcome and preventing individual complaints thereafter have been relaxed. The updated policy aligns with the GPF by allowing individual students to pursue their concerns even if part of a group, and by discouraging offers conditional on group-wide acceptance.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Representation (6.1.4): The blanket ban on legal representation has been removed. While generally discouraged, the policy now acknowledges that it may be appropriate in "very exceptional circumstances" and that reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act may necessitate College contribution to legal or other representation for disabled students. • Organisational Responsibilities (8) Curriculum leaders now responsible for Stage 1, Academic Registrar responsible for Stage 2 • Stage 1 – Local Resolution (Informal) (9.1, 9.7): This is the most significant change. The GPF emphasizes that early resolution should be truly informal, not typically requiring a form for initial raising of concerns, and that extensive investigation should prompt a move to the formal stage. The regenerated policy now states that initial concerns can be raised informally without a form. The "Stage 1 Record of Informal Higher Education Complaint Form (Form 1)" is clarified as an internal record for College staff to document the concern and its resolution, rather than a mandatory submission form for the student to <i>initiate</i> the informal stage. • Completion of Procedures Letter (CoPL) (9.22, 9.34): Clarification has been added regarding the issuance of a CoPL if a complaint is rejected at the initial assessment stage (Stage 2) and no further internal review is available, aligning with OIA guidance. The deadline for the CoPL following a Stage 3 review has been specified as "normally within 28 days of the decision". • Confidentiality (6.4): Strengthened to include the GPF's point that requests for confidentiality will be balanced against investigation needs, and it may make investigation difficult. • Recording and Learning from Complaints (6.12, 10.1.7): Greater emphasis on complaints as a source of learning and improvement, with specific guidance on recording minimum information anonymously for analysis. • Clarity of Language (11.1): An explicit commitment has been added to write regulations and procedures in clear, straightforward language, defining acronyms, and avoiding unnecessary footnotes. • Appendices (all): Flowchart and all forms redesigned to reflect changes to process
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1. Introduction

1.1 Expectations for complaints handling in Higher Education differ from those that apply to the College's other provision. The general principles are similar in both sectors, but the detailed requirements for process and record keeping differ. This policy and subsequent procedures are designed to support students and staff in navigating concerns and complaints effectively, ensuring fairness, transparency, and continuous improvement.

1.2 East Lancashire Learning Group (ELLG), which incorporates Nelson and Colne College, Lancashire Adult Learning and Accrington and Rossendale College ('the College'), is committed to continuous improvement and providing a high standard of service ensuring that any legitimate complaints received are addressed in an open, transparent, fair, professional, and non-discriminatory manner to the satisfaction of all parties involved. The outcomes from complaints support continuous improvement and are viewed positively as an opportunity to receive constructive feedback.

2. Our Commitment

2.1 The College will ensure that all legitimate complaints received are dealt with promptly, fairly, professionally and in a non-discriminatory manner, and that appropriate action is taken. Complaints will be taken seriously and viewed positively as an opportunity to receive constructive feedback so that improvements may be made.

2.2 The College will take appropriate steps to ensure that confidentiality is maintained, sharing information only with those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint or academic appeal.

2.3 The outcomes of any complaint will be shared with the complainant and any College staff involved. Students will not be penalised for making a genuine complaint, even if those concerns turn out to be misplaced. Complaints made which, on investigation, turn out to be malicious, may result in disciplinary or other further action. If the College decides to terminate consideration of a complaint due to it being frivolous, vexatious, or having no serious purpose, the student will be informed in writing of the reasons for this decision and provided with details on how to appeal this decision, including any associated timescale. A Completion of Procedures Letter will be issued at the end of any such appeal process.

3. Purpose

3.1 This policy and procedure is designed to provide Higher Education students with a complaints process that provides for fair consideration of issues raised and meets sector expectations. It aims to be accessible and clear, fair, independent and confidential, inclusive, flexible, proportionate and timely, and ultimately improve the student experience.

4. Legislative/Quality Framework

4.1 This policy and procedure are designed to meet the requirements and expectations of the Office for Students and of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and the expectations of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The Framework also informs how the OIA considers complaints.

5. Scope

5.1 This policy and procedure applies to all students who are registered with the College and whose studies include any one or more of the following qualifications:

5.1.1 an award at level 4 or above (e.g. certificate, diploma, or degree) made by any UK university

5.1.2 a higher education short course approved under the College's Higher Education Academic Regulations, whether or not this leads to an award.

5.2 Complaints from applicants or other complaints regarding the admissions process are not covered by this procedure. The process for consideration of complaints about admissions processes and/or decisions is contained within the College's Higher Education Academic Regulations. Applicants who are not registered students may not bring a complaint to the OIA at the end of those processes.

5.3 Where a student is registered for more than one award and the studies listed above form only part of the students' studies, this policy and procedure, as far as the context permits, apply only to those parts of the students' studies listed above. Complaints about matters connected solely to other studies should be taken through the College's general Complaints Policy and Procedure.

5.4 For the purposes of this document, a complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about something the College has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the College. This broader definition extends beyond solely "matters that affect the quality of a student's learning opportunities" to encompass a wider range of issues experienced by students.

This includes:

5.4.1 Failure by the College to meet its obligations, including those outlined in the Higher Education Student Agreement and any relevant programme handbook

5.4.2 Misleading or incorrect information in public information provided by the College

5.4.3 Concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching or administration

5.4.4 Concerns about the quality of facilities, learning resources or services provided by the College

5.4.5 The behaviour of a member of staff (inside or outside College)

5.4.6 The behaviour of another student (inside or outside College)

5.4.7 Concerns about policies or procedures relating to financial support, immigration processes or welfare support.

5.4.8 Concerns about a service delivered by other organisations or contractors on behalf of the College that the student feels has affected their learning experience.

5.5 Anonymous or third-party complaints will not normally be accepted, however, the College may decide to consider an anonymous complaint if there are good reasons for the matter to be investigated, for example because the complaint raises safeguarding issues, or issues that may affect a number of students or a whole department or course. Raising a concern anonymously might change the way that the College can investigate the issue, and limit how it can respond to and support the students concerned. For example, the College will not usually be able to issue a Completion of Procedures Letter if it doesn't know who made the complaint, so the student might not be able to bring their complaint to the OIA. Complaints that are not anonymous are still treated confidentially as far as possible. Third-party complaints will only be accepted if the third party is acting as a student's representative and the student has confirmed their agreement.

5.6 The College expects that students will not engage in frivolous or vexatious complaints. Students who do submit such complaints may be subject to disciplinary proceedings. The

College reserves the right to end consideration of a complaint if it is deemed to be frivolous or vexatious. Examples of such complaints include:

- 5.6.1 Complaints that contain false allegations or falsified evidence.
- 5.6.2 Complaints that are obsessive, harassing, or repetitive.
- 5.6.3 Insistence on pursuing non-meritorious complaints and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes.
- 5.6.4 Insistence on pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- 5.6.5 Complaints that are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- 5.6.6 Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

If the College decides to terminate consideration of a complaint under this policy, it will write to the student explaining why it is doing this. The student will be provided with details of how to appeal the decision and any associated timescale. At the end of any appeal process, the College will issue a Completion of Procedures Letter.

5.7 A group of students can use this procedure to make a collective complaint. However, the following criteria must be met before the complaint will be accepted:

- 5.7.1 One member of the group must be identified as the main contact for purposes of communication.
- 5.7.2 Each member of the group must submit their consent in writing and agree to abide by the procedure. The College will take reasonable measures to check that any students named in a group complaint are aware of the complaint and have actively agreed to be part of it.
- 5.7.3 The College will assume that any discussion or agreement with the main contact will be with the consent of the rest of the group.
- 5.7.4 If an offer to put things right is made, it will not normally be conditional on the whole group accepting it. Students should be able to decide on an individual basis whether any offer provides a satisfactory resolution for them, or if they want to go on to the next stage of the College's internal procedures or complain to the OIA. A student who was not part of the group from the start may join if their complaint would otherwise be in time under the College's procedures, and it would not be reasonable to refuse to look at it. If a student wishes to represent themselves individually after a group complaint, they should be able to do so.

5.8 Some issues are not eligible to be considered under this procedure. These are:

- 5.8.1 Dissatisfaction with a decision made by an academic body (e.g. a Board of Examiners) regarding student progression, academic assessment and awards. These issues are considered under the relevant academic appeals procedure.
- 5.8.2 Dissatisfaction about the outcome of an academic misconduct process.
- 5.8.3 Dissatisfaction with the outcome of other College processes that have an appropriate avenue of appeal. These include decisions relating to matters such as student discipline, fitness to practise, fitness to study, criminal convictions, attendance, etc.
- 5.8.4 Complaints about private accommodation.
- 5.8.5 Complaints about the Higher Education Student Council.
- 5.8.6 Matters relating to external companies, such as the Student Loans Company that have their own complaints procedures.

5.9 Where a student pursues an academic appeal and submits a complaint at the same time, and where the substance of the academic appeal and the complaint refer to the same

issues, the College (or external awarding body where appropriate) will normally suspend consideration of the Academic Appeal until the complaint has been investigated. This is because the outcome of the complaint investigation may inform consideration of the appeal. The College will take a flexible approach to managing interconnected cases, prioritising time-critical issues or concerns about student well-being, and communicating clearly with the student about the process to be followed.

5.10 If a matter arises as part of a complaint that might call into question the validity an academic decision that has already been made, the College may appeal that decision on the student's behalf. Where such an issue arises but the relevant decision has not yet been taken, the College will advise the appropriate decision making body (e.g. Board of Examiners) of its findings in relation to the complaint. In any such case, any disclosure of the details of the complaint will be limited to the minimum necessary for a valid academic decision to be made.

5.11 The College recognises that student complaints made about staff may refer to various issues, including complaints relating to assessment, feedback and academic related matters. Complaints may also refer to allegations about staff behaviour including bullying, harassment or discrimination.

5.12 Where the complaint relates to a member of staff, the student can submit a formal complaint under Stage 1 to the Academic Registrar or submit a Stage 2 of the procedure without completing Stage 1. Investigations into complaints about staff members will be conducted by someone independent of the situation to avoid bias or a reasonable perception of bias.

5.13 For the avoidance of doubt, complaints about the behaviour of staff or other students are not limited to their conduct while in College. However, any consideration of behaviour outside College will have regard to reasonable expectations of conduct in all the circumstances.

6. Statement of Principles

6.1 The complaints procedure operates on the principles of natural justice:

6.1.1 There are two sides to every dispute.

6.1.2 All parties are to be given the opportunity to provide evidence to substantiate their version of the issue / incident.

6.1.3 Full disclosure of any allegations or evidence will be made to those parties involved in the complaint.

6.1.4 All parties involved in a complaint have the right to be accompanied by a representative at each stage of the procedure.

While legal representation is generally not necessary or appropriate, the College will carefully consider whether it would be reasonable in exceptional circumstances to allow a student to use a legal representative. It is recognised that it is not good practice to ban students from using legal representation entirely. For disabled students, the College may consider contributing to the cost of representation where necessary to prevent disadvantage, as procedures must be accessible.

6.2 Students are expected to have met their obligations and responsibilities as members of the College with regard to:

6.2.1 Meeting their academic commitments.

6.2.2 Acting in accordance with College rules.

6.2.3 Behaving with consideration for other students and staff.

6.3 All complaints are taken seriously and students will not be penalised for making a genuine complaint.

6.4 All information provided regarding a complaint will remain confidential for use within this complaints process and is subject to the requirements of the Data Protection Act. Only those staff directly involved with the complaint will be given access to confidential information. In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary for the College to provide information to a third party with or without a student's consent. Students can request for their complaint or elements of it to be kept confidential, however, the College will need to balance this against the needs of the investigation, and it may make proper investigation difficult.

6.5 Where more than one individual is named in a complaint, normally those individuals will be party only to the matter(s) of complaint and outcome(s) that are directly specific to them.

6.6 At all stages of the procedure disabled students have a right to reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010. Other students may be provided appropriate support depending upon availability. The College will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to make reasonable adjustments to procedures to take account of individual needs and will keep a record of any adjustments made.

6.7 The effective resolution of complaints depends upon all those involved (staff & students) engaging in a way which recognises each other's interests and concerns, and all approaching the matter with objectivity and respect. The College therefore encourages complainants to recognise that an outcome which is not the one they might have been seeking is nevertheless valid, provided the investigation has been fair and based on the consideration of relevant available evidence.

6.8 All of the College's partner institutions require students to make use of College complaints procedures. Any student who makes a complaint directly to a partner institution, or other external body, will be referred back to the College's processes.

6.9 Where a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome this process they may have the opportunity to appeal the College decision to the appropriate partner university or other external awarding body. Some partner institutions may allow complainants to escalate their concerns before the completion of the College's procedures. The Academic Registrar will provide advice on partner's processes on request.

6.10 Once all College processes, and those of partner institutions where appropriate, have been completed the complainant(s) will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter.

6.11 If the complainant(s) is/are still not satisfied after this letter has been issued they will have the opportunity to seek adjudication from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA - www.oiahe.org.uk) if the studies in question fall within the OIA remit. The OIA will require a Completion of Procedures letter before entry to the independent adjudication process. The student should make their complaint to the OIA within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter.

6.12 Student complaints provide an important source of information to the College. The College will capture and share learning from complaints and academic appeals to improve services and the student experience. No confidential information will be included in these reports.

7. Time limits

7.1 There are strict time limits for submitting Higher Education Student Complaints and progressing to each stage of the process. This is to ensure that matters can be investigated when the circumstances are still fresh in people's minds and evidence is available to support a timely and appropriate resolution. The submission deadlines for each stage of the process are identified in the sections below.

7.2 The College will apply deadlines flexibly when the student has a good reason for making their complaint or academic appeal late, and will consider obligations under equalities legislation when doing so.

7.3 The College will endeavour to complete the processing of a formal complaint and any associated review (Stage 2 and Stage 3) within 90 calendar days.

7.4 This timeframe requires complainants to meet any College deadlines for the submission of material. The College reserves the right not to progress complaints that are submitted outside of the specified time limits and to terminate consideration of complaints should complainant(s) responses not be received within the stated time limits.

7.5 If, for good reason, such as the availability of essential witnesses, the College needs to extend the timeframe, the complainant(s) will be notified and kept regularly informed of the progress of the complaint. It is important to consider any reasons why a student's complaint or appeal might be urgent, and to remember that the urgency of an issue may change in response to external factors such as progression points.

8. Organisational Responsibilities

8.1 All staff need to be aware of the College's complaints procedure and how to handle and record concerns at the early resolution stage, and should be encouraged to resolve concerns quickly and as close to the point of service delivery as possible.

8.2 Normally, HE Curriculum Leaders (or their nominee) are responsible for receiving and investigating Stage 1 complaints and responding to the complainant within prescribed timescales.

8.3 Normally, the Academic Registrar (or their nominee) is responsible for receiving and investigating Stage 2 complaints and responding to the complainant within prescribed timescales.

8.4 The responsibility for dealing with Stage 3 complaints normally rests with the Dean of Higher Education (or their nominee).

9. Process

Stage 1 – Local Resolution (Informal)

9.1 Students are encouraged to raise concerns informally at the earliest opportunity with the relevant staff member. This stage is designed to address straightforward concerns quickly and locally. Students are not normally required to use a specific form to raise an initial informal concern.

9.2 If complainants are unsure of who to contact regarding their concern, then the Higher Education Admin Team will advise them of the relevant Curriculum Leader (or nominee).

9.3 All Stage 1 concerns should be raised within 30 calendar days of the event or issue complained about. The Curriculum Leader (or nominee) should normally respond to the complainant within 30 calendar days of receipt, in writing or by email. Where this is not possible for valid reasons, the staff member should advise the complainant of the anticipated timescale.

9.4 Complainants should keep a record of any action they take to resolve the concern and keep copies of all relevant correspondence.

9.5 The Higher Education Admin Team must be informed of, and keep a record of, all Stage 1 complaints. A record of Higher Education student complaints (all stages) must also be shared with SLT Support who is responsible for compilation of all college complaints.

9.6 The Assistant Principal for Finance and Resources will include within the annual report to Governors, any complaints received from Higher Education Students within the college.

9.7 The Curriculum Leader (or nominee) should complete a Stage 1 Record of Informal Higher Education Complaint Form (Form 1) to document the concern and its resolution. A copy of this record will be provided to the complainant. This record will summarise the main points of the concern, the investigation (if any brief investigation was required at this stage), findings, and any recommendations or actions taken.

9.8 Stage 1 responses and resolutions may include the following:

- Providing information, advice and explanations.
- Suggesting solutions.
- Apologies and resolution.
- Referral for mediation and/or conciliation.
- Referral to other appropriate support services.
- Referral to the Formal Higher Education Student Complaints procedure (Stage 2) or other College procedures.

9.9 If it is not possible to resolve the complaint locally at Stage 1, or if the complainant(s) is/are dissatisfied with the outcome of their Stage 1 complaint and believe(s) that the matter has not been properly addressed, then the complainant(s) can submit a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure.

9.10 The College recognises that there can be exceptional circumstances where it may not be appropriate to raise the matters locally (for example if the complaint involves complex, multiple issues or where the complaint relates to the conduct of staff or other students). In such cases, and such cases only, complainants should submit a formal complaint under Stage 2 of these procedures within 90 calendar days of the date of the event or when the issue of complaint occurred.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

9.11 Where the complaint has not been resolved or satisfactorily dealt with at Stage 1, then the complaint should progress to Stage 2.

9.12 Students will complete the Stage 2 – Notification of Formal Higher Education Complaint Form (Form 2). Formal complaints should be made within 90 calendar days of the date of the event or when the issue of complaint occurred. All Stage 2 - Formal Complaints should be made to the HE Admin Team who will keep a record of the complaint and in turn will forward to the Academic Registrar.

9.13 If a complaint is submitted outside the advertised deadlines, then the complaint will be deemed out of time and the College reserves the right not to progress the complaint any further.

9.14 Complainants should complete all sections of the complaint form, clearly and concisely describing their concerns and summarising the key events with relevant dates. Failure to complete all sections of the form clearly and legibly may lead to a delay in responding to the complaint, or the complaint not being progressed.

9.15 Complainants need to provide appropriate and relevant evidence to support any allegations they make (evidence may include signed witness statements, letters, emails and any other relevant information). The College cannot guarantee the return of original documents. Complainants should retain copies of the complaints form and any documentary evidence they submit.

9.16 Complaints will be considered strictly on the basis of the evidence supplied at Stage 2. Complainants should not assume that those considering their complaint are aware of their circumstances and must include all evidence they wish to be considered.

9.17 Where a complainant fails to provide reasonable evidence to substantiate their allegations, the College reserves the right not to progress the complaint further.

9.18 Complainants are also required to specify the remedy they seek and/or the desired outcome to their complaint.

9.19 Completed Stage 2 – Notification of formal complaint form and relevant evidence should be submitted to the Higher Education Admin Team either in writing or by email. Complainants using the postal service are advised to obtain proof of posting.

9.20 Complainants will receive a formal acknowledgement within 5 working days of submitting a complaint form to the Higher Education Admin Team.

9.21 On receipt of a formal complaint, the Higher Education Admin Team will forward all documentation to the Academic Registrar (or their nominee), who will undertake an initial assessment and consider whether:

- the complainant has submitted the form within the specified deadline.
- the complainant has set out clearly what the complaint is about, providing information relating to the key events and key dates.
- the issues of concern may be more appropriately considered under alternative processes rather than this procedure.
- the complainant has provided reasonable evidence to substantiate their complaint.
- further information is required (in relation to the eligibility of the complaint) from the complainant or relevant department.

9.22 If the complaint is rejected, for example if the complaint was submitted late or was submitted without reasonable evidence, the complainant will be notified in writing of the reasons for the decision. The complainant will be provided with a Completion of Procedures Letter should they wish to pursue the matter further, as no internal review of this decision is typically available.

9.23 If the complaint is accepted, there are a number of ways in which it may be progressed at this stage, depending on the nature and complexity of the complaint. Complainants will be notified in writing of how their complaint will be progressed. Such action may include:

- A request for further information or clarification.
- A meeting with the Academic Registrar (or their nominee) to clarify matters of procedure and issues of complaint.
- Investigation by the Academic Registrar (or their nominee), who will provide a written response to the complaint.
- Referral of the complaint to a named person who will investigate the matter and provide a written response to the complaint.
- Mediation facilitated by the Academic Registrar (or their nominee).
- Nominating an Investigating Officer to investigate the circumstances of the complaint.
- Arranging a Formal Hearing of the complaint.

9.24 Complaints against College staff will normally be investigated by a nominated Investigating Officer (IO). The IO will have no direct association with the staff member's line management.

9.25 Wherever possible the College will seek to facilitate an early resolution of the complaint. The College aims to provide a response within **30 calendar days** of submission of the complaint. Should this not be the case, then complainants will be kept informed of any likely delay, and the reasons for the delay, at the earliest opportunity.

9.26 Complainants will receive written notification of the outcome of their complaint from the HE Admin Team. This will include whether the complaint is upheld or not, the rationale for the decision and any further action to be taken. The HE Admin Team will ensure that a Higher Education Complaint Investigation Report (Form 3) is completed and made available to the complainant(s). This report will also clearly explain whether the person investigating the complaint made the final decision or referred it to another senior member of staff or a complaints panel.

Stage 3 – Final Internal Review

9.27 Complainants have the right to request a review of their formal complaint by the Vice Principal Academic Principal Curriculum and Quality (or their nominee) where they believe and can substantiate that:

9.27.1 the Stage 2 procedure has not been followed correctly and/or

9.27.2 the formal complaint has not been appropriately addressed and/or

9.27.3 the decision regarding the outcome of their formal complaint is unreasonable in all the circumstances.

9.27.4 New evidence that could make a difference to the outcome and which the student could not reasonably have provided earlier in the process.

9.28 The grounds for the review should be clearly stated in writing and sent with full supporting evidence, within 15 calendar days of the date of the Stage 2 outcome letter to the HE Admin Team by post or email using the Stage 3 – Request for Review of Higher Education Complaint Form (Form 4). Evidence provided for Stage 2 of this process should not be re-sent. Complainants using the postal service should use the Recorded Delivery Service.

9.29 An acknowledgement of the Stage 3 complaint will be sent to the complainant within 5 working days.

9.30 The Stage 3 of the Procedure is not a re-opening of the complaint and will not consider issues afresh or involve a further investigation. A complaint must have been considered at Stage 2 before it can be escalated to Stage 3.

9.31 New evidence will not be considered, unless the complainant can demonstrate valid reasons why they were unable to provide this evidence earlier in the process.

9.32 If necessary, the Reviewer may contact the complainant and/or relevant staff to clarify any issues and/or matters of procedure.

9.33 The Complainants will be formally notified in writing of the decision of the Reviewer, normally within 45 calendar days. The Reviewer will determine whether the Stage 3 Complaint should be Upheld, Upheld in Part or Not Upheld and provide the reasons for this decision and specify if any appropriate action or remedy is required. The HE Admin Team will ensure that a Stage 3 – Higher Education Complaint Review Report (Form 5) is completed and made available to the complainant(s).

9.34 The decision of the Reviewer is final and this represents the completion of internal College procedures. The College will provide the complainant with a Completion of Procedures letter following review, normally within 28 days of the decision.

9.35 Complainants who have completed the College's internal procedures and remain unsatisfied with the outcome may have the right to pursue their complaint with an external awarding body. The the Academic Registrar (or their nominee) will provide advice on complainants' rights on request.

9.36 Complainants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the review and believe that the College has failed to follow this procedure correctly may take their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

10. Record Keeping

10.1 Detailed record keeping is essential to ensure the fair treatment of complaints. The HE Admin Team must ensure that the following records are kept for all complaints:

10.1.1 SLT Support are notified of all complaints, Stage 1, Stage 2 or Stage 3.

10.1.2 Copies of all written and email correspondence with complainants relating to complaints.

10.1.3 Copies of completed Stage 1 Records of informal higher education complaint (Form 1).

10.1.4 Copies of all Stage 2 Notifications of formal higher education complaint (Form 2).

10.1.5 All evidence provided by complainants.

10.1.6 Copies of all Stage 3 review requests (Form 4) and Higher education complaint investigation reports (Form 3/5).

10.1.7 A summary of the issue(s) raised, relevant dates, and the outcome including a summary of the reasons for any decisions made, ensuring personal information is removed or anonymised to prevent identification.

10.2 These records may be kept either on paper or by any durable electronic means.

10.3 Any confidential information included in complaints records must be stored either in sealed envelopes or by means of password-protected electronic storage.

10.4 Complainants must, on request, be provided with copies of any information relating to their complaint(s). Any confidential information about individuals other than the requesting complainant must be redacted.

10.5 Records of complaints will be disclosed, on request, to any other body, typically a partner institution or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, with a legitimate need to see them.

10.6 Records will not be disclosed to any other person or body and will not be used for any purpose other than consideration of the complaint(s) raised.

11. Dissemination

11.1 The College will ensure that all regulations and procedures are accessible and written clearly and in straightforward language, defining acronyms and avoiding unnecessary footnotes to enhance understanding. A copy of this policy can be found on:

11.2 The College's website(s), under the policies and procedures section

11.3 The College Staff Hub

11.4 A pertinent section of the students' virtual learning environment

12. Monitoring and Review

12.1 Senior management will ensure mechanisms are in place for consistent monitoring, review, and reporting of concerns and complaints information to improve services to students and the student experience. The policy will be reviewed on a three-yearly cycle by the Vice Principal Academic.

13. Related Policies/Procedures

13.1 Documents related to the policy are:

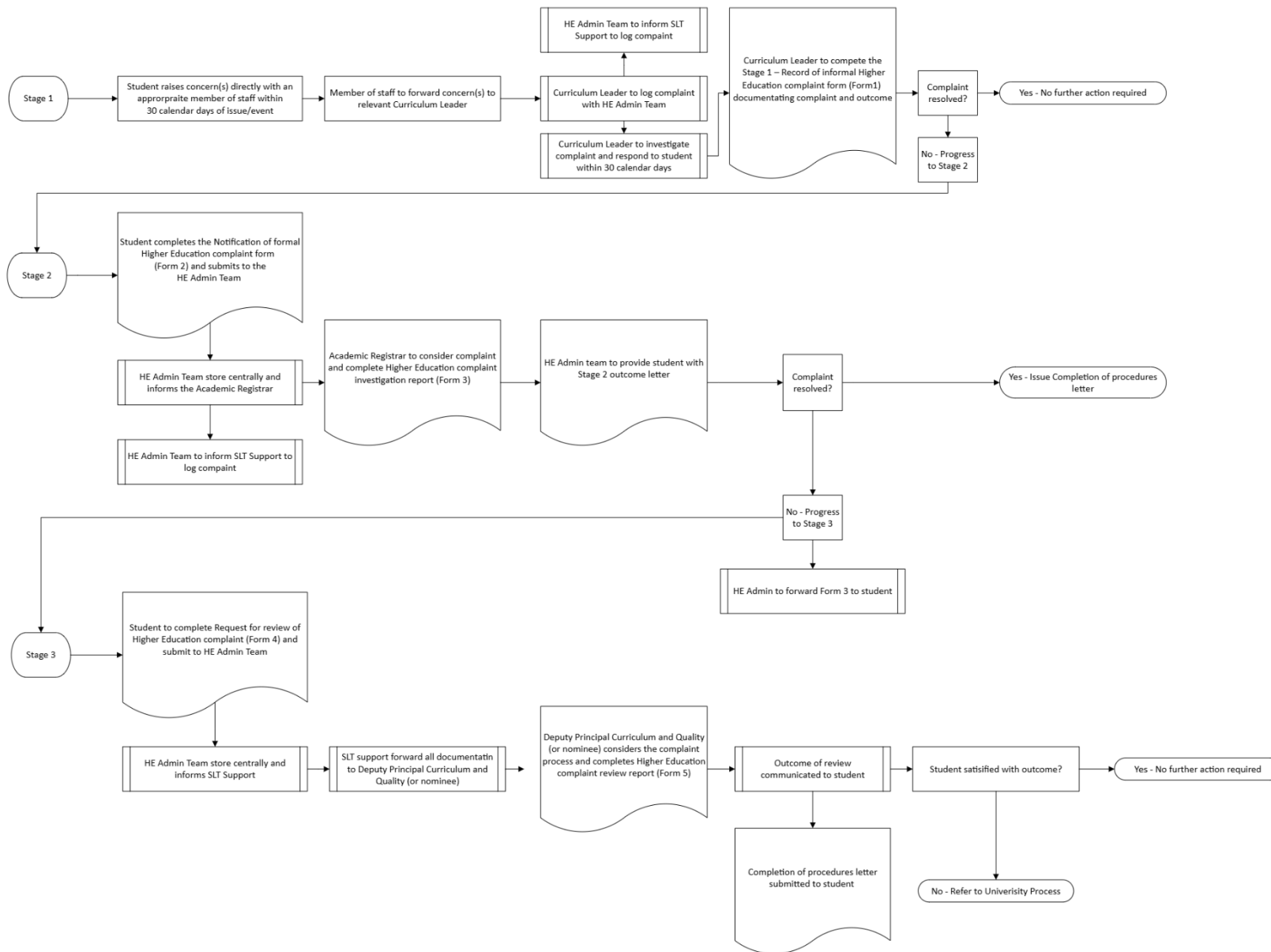
13.1.1 Higher Education Academic Regulations

13.1.2 Complaints Policy and Procedure

14. Management Responsibility

14.1 The Vice Principal Academic has management responsibility for this policy across the East Lancashire Learning Group.

15. Appendices



Stage 1 – Record of informal Higher Education complaint form (Form1)

To be completed by a **Curriculum Leader**, following raising of concerns by student to relevant member of staff.

Date form completed	
Curriculum leader completing report	
Student(s) name(s)	
Student ID number (s)	
Students Programme(s) of study and Occurrence(s)	
Nature of complaint (summarise the main points, attach a copy of the original complaint to this form):	
Date issue raised:	
Summary of investigation and any recommendations:	
In the course of my investigation I...	
<i>(add in details, including any meetings and witness statements. Attach as appendices and list them)</i>	
Following investigation, my findings regarding the above points are as follows:	
<i>(response to each point raised in the complaint)</i>	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
etc.	
I therefore find that the complaint is upheld / not upheld / partially upheld <i>(delete as appropriate)</i>.	
As a result of the above finding, I make the following recommendations:	
<i>(Add details of any recommendations and/ or redress to the student, and include who is responsible for carrying out the actions)</i>	

Additional comments

The complainant should sign below (or email) to confirm that the proposed actions and/or review of the issues has resolved the complaint:

Curriculum Leaders name		Signature		Date	
Student/s Name/s:		Signature/s		Date	

**N.B. Should the student remain dissatisfied then they may progress to Stage 2 – Formal Complaint
The informal complaint investigator must ensure the student is directed to the HE Complaints
Procedure, and given the contact details of the Academic Registrar.**

For HE Admin Team use only

Date complaint received:

Date forwarded to SLT Support:

Stage 2 – Notification of formal Higher Education Complaint form (Form 2)

To be completed by **the student, within 90 calendar days** of the date of the event or when the issue of complaint occurred. The College will acknowledge the receipt of the form within **5 working days** and aim to formally respond within **30 calendar days**.

This formal complaint form should normally only be used when the student(s) have completed Stage 1 (as above) and tried to resolve the problem directly with the person or persons concerned and are dissatisfied with the outcome. Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered (please see section 5.5 of HE Complaints Policy).

Date form completed	
Student(s) name(s)	
Student ID number (s)	
Students Programme(s) of study and Occurrence(s)	
Your contact address including postcode:	
Your current contact details Phone number/s:	
Email address:	
Have you completed Stage 1 – informal stage? Yes/No	
If yes, You MUST attach a copy of the Record of informal complaint form and any other relevant documents, if you have not had a form, attach copies of email correspondence etc.	

Notification of formal complaint form – cont.

Please summarise the main points of your complaint below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Please note that you cannot complain about academic judgement. If you wish feel there may have been a procedural irregularity in the marking of academic work you should submit an academic appeal, and not a complaint.

Details of your complaint: (continue on a separate sheet if necessary, please try to use clear language, use bullet points and use only factual information)

What outcome/s do you hope to achieve through this complaint?

Please list any supporting evidence:

(eg witness statements, emails, etc. please number and attach)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Completed forms should be submitted to the HE Admin Team either at the UC reception or to he@nelsongroup.ac.uk

For HE Admin Team use only

Date complaint received:

Date forwarded to Academic Registrar:

Date forwarded to SLT Support:

Stage 2 – Higher Education complaint investigation report (Form 3)

To be completed by **the Academic Registrar (or nominee)** and normally provided to the student within **30 calendar days** of submission of Form 2.

Date form completed	
Student(s) name(s)	
Student ID number (s)	
Students Programme(s) of study and Occurrence(s)	
Complaint investigated by: (Academic Registrar or nominee)	
Investigation report	
<p>A formal complaint was submitted on (<i>date</i>). In summary the points raised in the complaint were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. etc. <p>In the course of my investigation I <i>(add in details, including any meetings and witness statements. Attach as appendices and list them)</i></p> <p>Following investigation, my findings regarding the above points are as follows: <i>(response to each point raised in the complaint)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. <p>I therefore find that the complaint is upheld / not upheld / partially upheld <i>(delete as appropriate)</i>.</p> <p>As a result of the above finding, I make the following recommendations: (Add details of any recommendations and/ or redress to the student)</p> <p>Additional comments:</p>	

Signature:		Date:	
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For HE Admin Team use only

Date form received:

Date forwarded to SLT Support:

Date forwarded to complainant:

Stage 3 – Request for review of Higher Education complaint (Form 4)

To be completed by the **student**, within **15 calendar days** of the date of the Stage 2 outcome letter. The College will acknowledge the receipt of the form within **5 working days** and aim to formally respond within **45 calendar days**.

This form is a request to review a decision taken at Stage 2 of the Higher Education Complaints Policy and Procedure. It cannot be used until a decision has been taken at Stage 2.

The grounds for review are limited to cases where the student believes, and can substantiate, that:

- the Stage 2 procedure has not been followed correctly
- the formal complaint has not been appropriately addressed

and/or

- the decision regarding the outcome of their formal complaint is unreasonable in all the circumstances.

You must enclose the decision letter from Stage 2 of your complaint with this form.

Your Name:
Signature:
Date:
Student ID number:
Programme of study:
Your contact address including postcode: <i>(we will usually contact you by email, but please provide a postal address in case we need to send you some documents)</i>
Your current contact details Phone number/s: Email address:
Please state the grounds for reviewing the Stage 2 decision: 1. 2. 3.
Please list any evidence supporting this request: 4. 5. 6.
Completed forms should be submitted to the HE Admin Team either at the UC reception or to he@nelsongroup.ac.uk

For HE Admin Team:

Date request received:

Date forwarded to SLT Support:

Stage 3 – Higher Education complaint review report Form 5

To be completed by the Vice Principal Academic (or their nominee).

Review report prepared by (print name)		Date	
Stage 2 Complaint Lead (print name)		Name of student/s and student ID number/s	
Review report			
<p>A review request was submitted on <i>(date)</i>. In summary the grounds raised for the review were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. etc. <p>In the course of my investigation I <i>(add in details, including any meetings and witness statements. Attach as appendices and list them)</i></p> <p>Following investigation, my findings regarding the above points are as follows: <i>(response to each point raised in the complaint)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. etc. <p>I therefore find that the original decision is upheld / not upheld / partially upheld <i>(delete as appropriate)</i>.</p> <p>As a result of the above finding, I make the following recommendations: <i>(Add details of any recommendations and/ or redress to the student)</i></p>			
Signature:		Date:	

For HE Admin Team use only

Date form 5 received:

Date form 5 forwarded to complainant:

Date form 5 forwarded to SLT Support:

Date Completion of Procedures Letter forwarded to student: