

## UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

### SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK

#### **RULES OF PROCEDURE AND PROCEEDINGS WITH RESPECT TO A STUDENT'S COMPLAINT REGARDING THE QUALITY OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE ON PRACTICE AND WORK PLACEMENTS**

This procedure was approved for use by the School Academic Committee – Health and Social Work on 22 June 2022 (Minute 91.1, refers) and supersedes all previous versions from that date.

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#### **SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK RULES OF PROCEDURE AND PROCEEDINGS WITH RESPECT TO A STUDENT'S COMPLAINT REGARDING THE QUALITY OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE ON PRACTICE AND WORK PLACEMENTS**

##### **1 Purpose and Scope**

- 1.1 This procedure sets out a framework, and establishes a documented procedure, for dealing with complaints received from students whilst on placement outside the University. It complies with the guiding principles outlined in the UKSCQA and QAA Code relating to the Concerns, Complaints and Appeals (November 2018). The complaints to be considered under this procedure are those that impinge on the quality of the student's placement and/or work-based learning experience.
- 1.2 The procedure explains the process if a student makes a complaint about the host organisation, their practice placement and/or work-based placement. It also provides specific details about how the complaint procedure will be operationalised and managed. Reasonable adjustments will be made to the procedures and proceedings to ensure equality of opportunity for disabled students and any other protected characteristics.
- 1.3 This procedure is not to be used for raising or escalating a concern on placement (whistle-blowing). Raising and escalating concerns about a placement is related to malpractice and wrongdoing. If you wish to raise or escalate a concern the university's whistle-blowing/ raising and escalating concerns procedure is contained under UPR GV16 'Whistleblowing Policy'. This includes a whistle-blowing hotline number.
- 1.4 If you need to raise a concern/ whistle-blow about your placement, it has been agreed with placement providers that you must inform your mentor/ practice teacher/ practice educator and follow the placement providers raising and escalating concerns/ whistle-blowing process. You must also inform your programme leader or university placement link tutor as soon as possible. If your programme leader is unavailable, you must inform your personal tutor.
- 1.5 This procedure must be read in conjunction with other University procedures and policies. In addition, relevant partner organisational policies may need to be applied in conjunction with University procedures. Depending on the nature of the complaint, some issues may also need to be addressed through a host organisation procedure, for example harassment or bullying. In these cases, the student will be provided with appropriate support from the University and through any interface with the University's Bullying and Harassment Dignity and Respect: Dealing with Bullying and/or Harassment policy (UPR EQ10) as required. This may include support, advice or guidance from the student's personal tutor, programme leader, link lecturer, medical

or counselling services and disability/ mental wellbeing advisors. If there is any uncertainty regarding the procedure that should be implemented, advice must be sought from the relevant Host Manager and/or the Department/ Discipline Practice Complaints Officers and/ or the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate.

- 1.6 Students who are employed by another organisation, e.g. a local Trust, or who are sponsored by the NHS or health and social care agency and need to make a complaint about their employer should follow the local NHS, Trust or sponsoring organisation procedure. The student will be provided with appropriate support from the University as required. The role of academic staff is to ensure that the complaint is handled appropriately by the organisation and to monitor the outcome.
- 1.7 If a host organisation procedure or procedure is applied in any of the above, the University would not normally duplicate process and would review the received outcome from the host organisations procedures and/ or investigations.

## 2 General Principles

- 2.1 It must be established that there has been a complaint, rather than an expression of concern, which will normally be managed through the relevant programme officer. Expressions of concern are considered as an alternative means of resolving any concerns as early as possible.
- 2.2 If the complaint is of a serious nature, e.g. the student is in a vulnerable, dangerous or unsupervised position; a formal procedure will be instigated immediately.
- 2.3 Complaints may be made by individual students, or in appropriate cases, collectively as a group of students. Individual statements may be required from all group members and a key spoke person for the group may also need to be identified.
- 2.4 All complaints will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible and normally within the timescales stipulated in Sections 3 and 4 below. A staged process will be followed, locally or formally, as stipulated in Sections 3 and 4. Complaints will be dealt with confidentially as far as is possible, but the student will normally be informed if the University personnel involved need to consult others with whom information must be shared. University personnel will work in partnership with relevant placement providers in managing complaints. The Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate will monitor and analyse the number and range of complaints received within the School on an annual basis. The procedure will be reviewed bi-annually.
- 2.5 Emphasis throughout the process will be on early resolution of the issue. As far as possible, this will be at a local level. A full, fair and honest response to a complaint is essential, as it may not always be possible for the University to satisfy the complainant. Notifying the complainant and relevant others that action will be taken (but not disclosing details of the action, which is confidential) is an important component of the process.
- 2.6 Academic staff will encourage a sensitive and constructive approach to addressing all matters dealt with under this procedure. Staff will ensure that complaints are usually handled within the prescribed timescales and that the outcomes are communicated at all stages. A member of staff who specifically supports students in matters related to disability, gender, race, age, religion or sexual orientation will be invited to participate in the discussions/proceedings of a complaint, particularly where the complaint or the resolution relates to an equality or diversity matter. The involvement

of this member of staff can be at the student's request or if the staff handling the complaint feels that this would be in the student's best interests due to the nature of the complaint.

- 2.7 The student will normally be supported at any meeting by a University representative such as a link lecturer/programme tutor/disability/ mental welling advisor or other staff member involved in the complaint. The student also has the right to be accompanied by a Student Union representative, friend, relative or colleague. This person attends in a purely advisory capacity, i.e. as a friend/supporter.
- 2.8 Throughout the complaint process, whilst respecting the confidentiality of all parties, relevant personnel will be informed of any action that needs to be taken in terms of both the student's programme of study and their work based or practice learning environment.
- 2.9 Every attempt will be made to resolve identified issues thus providing a satisfactory work based or placement learning environment for the student in the allocated placement. However, it may be necessary, following the initial consideration of the complaint and/or investigation to find an alternative placement experience for the student. All relevant personnel will be consulted if deemed necessary.

### 3 The Complaint Procedure

Examples of complaints that may be received are included in **Appendix 1** and a summary of the complaint process is provided in **Appendix 2**

#### 3.1 Stage 1 – Local procedure

The student should initially approach the designated Host Manager or alternate at the work based or placement site regarding their complaint. If a student feels unable to raise their complaint with the designated Host Manager or it would be inappropriate to do so, the student should raise their complaint with the visiting academic tutor/link lecturer, although any member of academic staff can receive a complaint. Receipt of the complaint (verbal or written) must be acknowledged and recorded by the recipient of the complaint completing **Complaint form – details of the complaint**.

- 3.2 The complaint will be considered locally in the first instance. A meeting to discuss the complaint must be convened by the recipient and/or involve the link lecturer/visiting academic tutor (if different), the student and the Host Manager if appropriate. The meeting will normally take place within 15 working days of the complaint being made. The outcome of the meeting will be recorded on the **Complaint form – Section 1A** by the link lecturer/visiting academic tutor. Normally, an action plan and/or recommendation will be documented and a date for a meeting to review the action plan/recommendations will be set. A copy of the **Details of the complaint and Section 1A** must be sent to all those present at the meeting, the Department Practice Complaints Officer (or equivalent), the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate, the programme leader and a copy placed in the student's file within ten working days of the meeting taking place.
- 3.3 The meeting to review the action plan/recommendations must take place between the link lecturer/visiting academic tutor and the Host Manager involved in the initial complaint, and the student if appropriate. The aim of the review meeting will be to ensure that any actions arising from the complaint have been implemented. The outcome of the meeting will be recorded on the **Complaint form – Section 1B** by the link lecturer/visiting academic tutor. A copy of the form should be sent to those present at the meeting, the Department Practice Complaints Officer (or equivalent) the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or

designate, the programme leader and a copy placed in the student's file within ten working days of the review meeting taking place.

- 3.4 If, following the above meetings, the complaint has not been resolved or the actions have not been implemented, Section 2 of this procedure must be applied.

#### 4 **Stage 2 - Formal procedure**

- 4.1 This procedure will be invoked if the complaint has not been resolved following the investigations undertaken during Section 1 of the process, or if the complaint is so serious in nature, *e.g. the student is in a vulnerable, dangerous or unsupervised position*, that it is not appropriate to attempt resolution at the preliminary stage. In a case of a breach of the Memorandum of Co-operation (or equivalent *e.g.* placement agreement) by the work based or practice placement, the University may pursue the complaint on behalf of the student.
- 4.2 The Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate will appoint an experienced member of academic staff to conduct an investigation into the complaint. The investigator could be an academic clinical co-ordinator, a programme officer or strategic practice lead. The investigator will not normally be involved with the complainant or the subject matter of the complaint but may be from within the same Department and/or School.
- 4.3 The investigator will then carry out an impartial investigation, consulting with the complainant, the link lecturer/visiting academic tutor, Host Manager and/or other relevant stakeholders.
- 4.4 The investigation will normally involve interviewing the complainant, the recipient of the complaint and other relevant personnel, either separately or together, as appropriate. An action plan agreed by all stakeholders will be drawn up by the investigator. The action plan must identify appropriate actions and recommendations and identify how these will be implemented with appropriate timescales. A date for a review of the action plan will be set. The outcome of the meeting will be recorded by the investigator on the **Complaint form – Section 2A**.
- 4.5 Following the completion of the investigation, the investigator must convene a meeting with the complainant to discuss the outcome of the investigation.
- 4.6 Wherever possible, the investigator will normally report the findings of the investigation to the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate within 15 working days of the completion of the investigation. If the investigator is the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) they must report back to the Associate Dean of School (Academic Quality). The Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) will keep a record of the Formal Complaint Form for a maximum of three years. A copy will also be held in the student's file for the duration of his/her study.
- 4.7 The meeting to review the action plan must take place between the investigator and the Host Manager involved in the complaint at a time determined at the meeting to discuss the complaint. The aim of the review meeting will be to ensure that any actions have been implemented. The outcome of the meeting will be recorded by the investigator. A copy of the **Complaint form – Section 2B** must be sent to those present at the meeting, the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate, the programme leader and a copy placed in the student's file within ten working days of the review meeting taking place.

## 5 Associated procedures

- 5.1 If at any stage during the investigation of a complaint, an NHS or other relevant partner organisation or health and social care procedure is deemed more appropriate or needs to be implemented simultaneously, then the procedure identified in that procedure will be applied, avoiding duplication where possible.
- 5.2 If, during the investigation, the student considers that the complaint is not being handled appropriately by the University, the student can make a complaint through the University complaint procedure, Student and Applicant Complaints (UPR SA16).
- 5.3 If, following investigation, the complaint remains unresolved or the action plan and recommendations have not been implemented, the suitability of the work based or placement site for future students will be reviewed by the University in conjunction with senior management in the organisations and, if appropriate, any relevant commissioning bodies.
- 5.4 Students complaints about work based or practice placements, which on investigation are found to be of a malicious or vexatious nature will be managed through appropriate University procedures.
- 5.5 The University retains the right to share any information that it is considered appropriate to disclose with any professional, statutory or regulatory body. Where this decision has been taken all relevant parties will be informed by the Department/ Discipline Practice Complaints Officers and/ or the Associate Dean, Academic Quality Assurance – Practice Enhancement or designate.

## 6 Monitoring of Proceedings

- 6.1 The monitoring of proceedings will be undertaken by the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate.
- 6.2 A full report of complaints managed by the Department/ Discipline Practice Complaints Officers will be sent to the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate by 31 July each year. The template for the report is to be found in **Appendix 3**.
- 6.3 The Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) School or designate will submit an annual report to the Dean of School for consideration by the School Academic Committee. This will include an analysis of relevant equality data accessed through the Student Record System. The Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance (Practice Enhancement) or designate may routinely ask a random sample of students who have made a complaint within the previous year if they have any concerns about how the investigation of the complaint was handled.

## APPENDIX 1

### **Examples of possible complaints about a placement or work-based learning environment**

- Inadequacies in mentoring/supervision
- Failure to provide an adequate learning environment
- Inadequacies in induction or orientation to the work based or placement site
- Refusal to acknowledge and/or address legitimate concerns raised by the student

### **Examples of serious complaints where the student may be in a *vulnerable, dangerous or unsupervised position* may include**

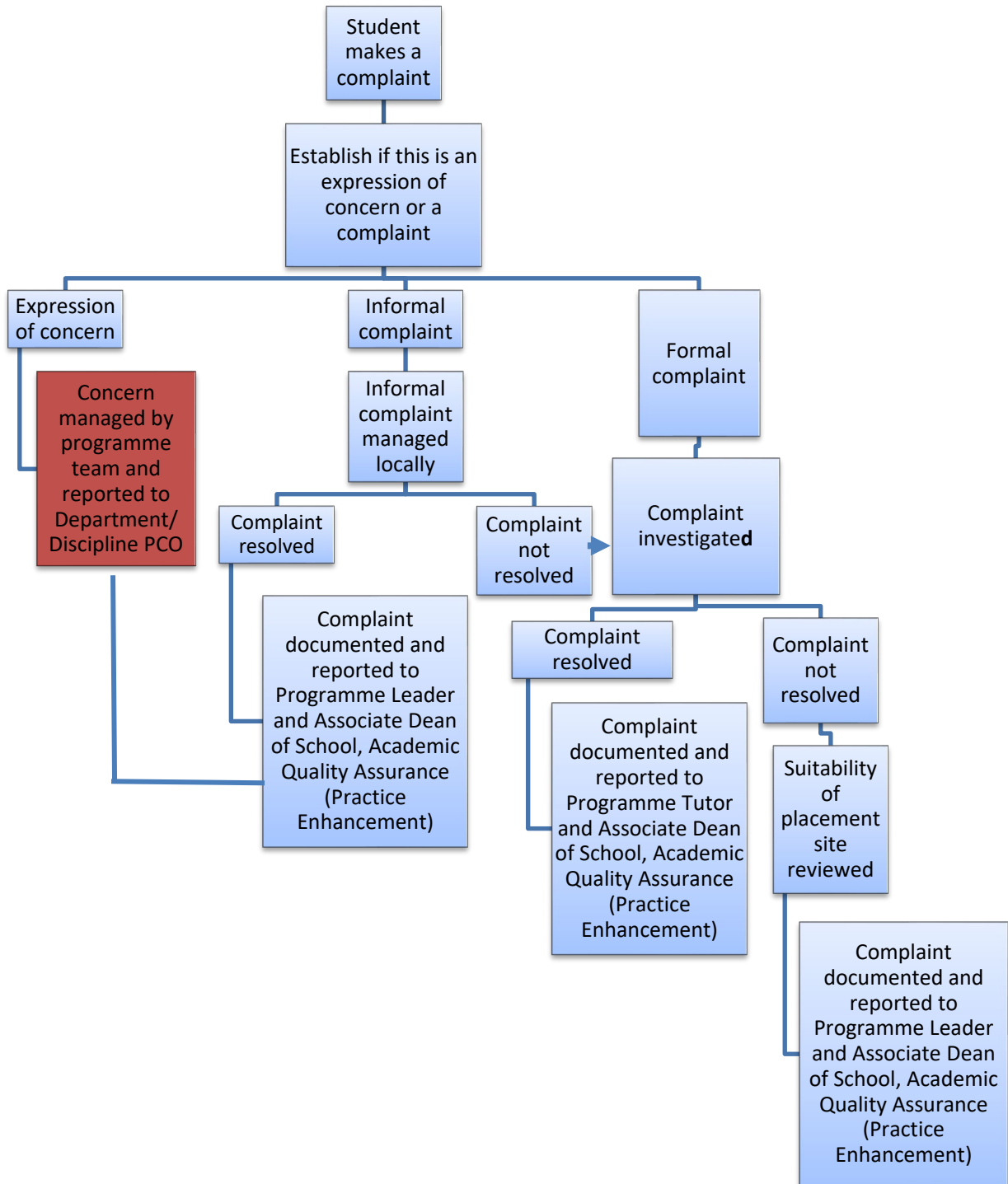
- Serious inadequacies or absence in mentoring/supervision
- Refusal to acknowledge and/or address concerns raised by previous complaints
- Inappropriate behaviour towards student
- Failure to acknowledge equality and diversity issues

### **The following complaints may be dealt with through relevant Trust policies**

- Failure to uphold health and safety procedures
- Harassment and bullying

Summary of complaint procedure

APPENDIX 2



**Practice Placement Complaints Report Template** (To be completed by Programme Officer)

**APPENDIX 3**

**Name of School:** School of Health and Social Work **Name of Department**

**Date of Report:**

<b>Student's programme of Study</b>	<b>Seniority of Student</b> (please identify by year)	<b>Summary of Complaint</b> (State if Eeco, Local and/or Formal Complaint and please outline)	<b>Nature resolution/outcome</b> (Including support offered to student, outcome letters, Whether issue was reported to the relevant professional body).