

Document Title	Complaints
Policy Area	Area 7: Support for Learners
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Learners only <input type="checkbox"/> Staff and Learners

Document Owner	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs
Approved by	Academic Council

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Related legislation, policies, procedures, guidelines and local protocols	<p>This policy has been designed with due regard to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI - Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI - Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), et. al (2015), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)
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Table of Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. Scope/Application.....	3
3. Definitions	3
4. Responsibility	3
5. Policy	3
6. Procedure for Dealing with Informal Complaints	4
7. Procedure for Dealing with Formal Complaints.....	4
8. Formal Complaint Appeal	5
9. Policy Monitoring.....	7
10. Document Control.....	7

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to outline the mechanisms to initiate a complaint. Complaints are made in the event that learners or other external parties feel they have been unfairly treated or disadvantaged as a result of the service provided by SQT or the actions and behaviours of a member of staff or Tutor.

2. SCOPE/APPLICATION

This policy applies to complaints relating to any aspect of SQT services and programmes with the exception of academic appeals, which is dealt with in [QAP7-6 Academic Appeals](#). Complaints can be made by learners or other external individuals who receives, requests or are directly affected by the services of SQT.

3. DEFINITIONS

- **Complainant:** A person who made the complaint
- **Complainee:** A person who is being complained about

4. RESPONSIBILITY

The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

5. POLICY

SQT is committed to providing a high-quality service for all its learners. Complaints are taken very seriously and are considered an important source of information for continuous improvements in the specific area. Complaints are handled sensitively and with due consideration for the confidentiality of all the parties involved.

SQT operate a two-stage process for addressing complaints

- I. An **informal complaint** procedure that encourages a prompt resolution of problems at the initial stage - SQT endeavours to deal with all complaints on an informal basis using appropriate mechanisms such as meetings or telephone calls with the complainant and other relevant personnel such as Tutors, Programme Directors, Course Administration Managers, Director of Quality and Academic Affairs and the Managing Director.
- II. A **formal stage** that deals with complaints that cannot be resolved informally - the procedure below is adhered to when dealing with formal complaints. All complaints are treated promptly, fairly, impartially and in confidence. SQT always ensures that no complaint made in good faith shall be used to disadvantage any person in the future.

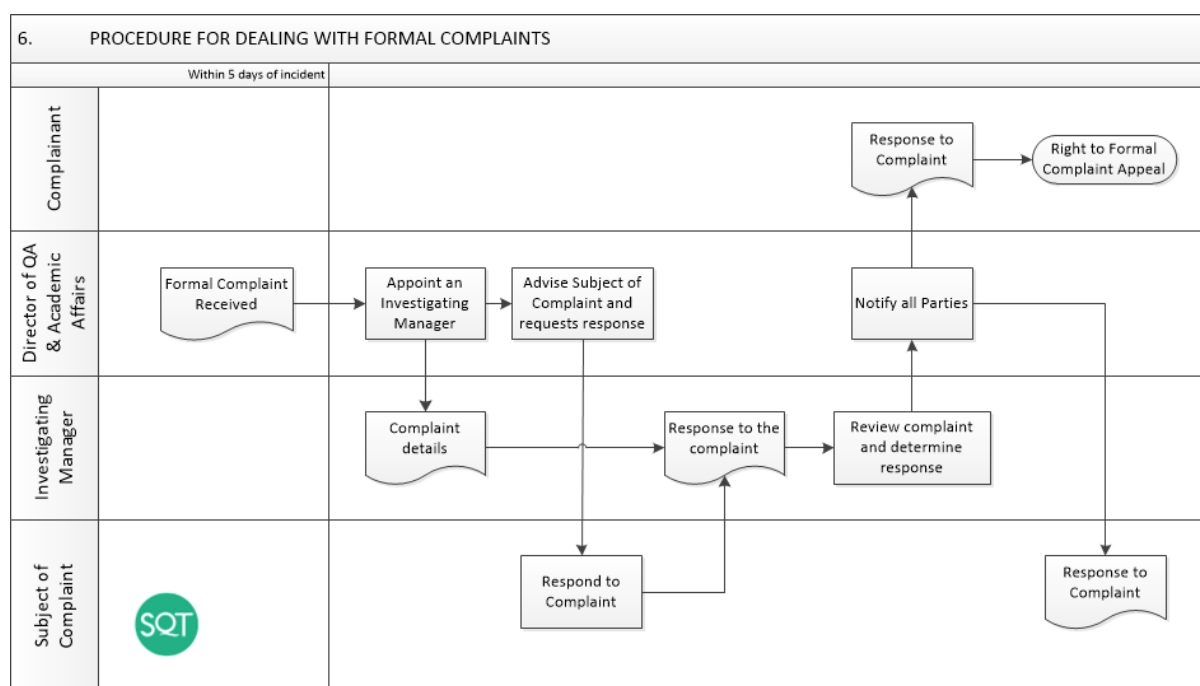
6. PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

1. Initial informal communication can be made orally or in writing. This must be received within five working days of the complaint arising.
2. The relevant staff member acknowledges the complaint within 3 working days and attempts to mediate a satisfactory resolution through informal communication with the complainant. Where appropriate, additional personnel such as the Programme Director may also communicate with the complainant if this assists the informal resolution of the complaint.

There are two possible outcomes at this stage:

- I. The complaint is resolved: The process concludes here and no formal record is retained.
- II. Where the complaint is not resolved through informal discussions, either
 - a. The complainant decides not to pursue the matter further or
 - b. The complainant makes a formal complaint.

7. PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH FORMAL COMPLAINTS



1. Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.
2. Complaints should normally be made within 5 working days of the alleged incident, matter or concern. Where a complaint is not made within 5 working days of the alleged incident, matter or concern, a rationale must be provided to explain this delay. In any instance, a complaint will not be accepted where the matter complained of took place more than six weeks in the past, other than where an informal process was undertaken within the 6 week period.
3. Complaints should be documented as comprehensively and specifically, as possible and supported by appropriate evidence.

4. The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs appoints an independent and competent member of staff (Investigating Manager) appropriate to the facts of the complaint.
5. The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs, at this point, advises the complainee(s) (subject(s) of the complaint) and provides this person(s) with the details of the nature of the complaint and invites a response.
 - The response is considered by the Investigating Manager.
 - The Investigating Manager may wish to arrange a meeting to discuss the complaint with the complainant or complainee(s) (the subject(s) of the complaint).
 - The purpose of the discussion is to establish facts and to seek clarification. The Investigating Manager is not authorised to give a viewpoint or decision relating to the complaint.
 - A note-taker may accompany the Investigating Manager to create an accurate record of the discussion.
6. Where the complaint is not considered valid by the Investigating Manager, the process concludes.
7. Where the result of the complaint includes consequent caution or recommendations, the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs notifies the appropriate person or committee, without undue delay.
8. The Director of Quality and Academic Affairs formally responds in writing to all relevant parties to inform them of:
 - The findings of the investigation
 - Any decisions made
 - The reasons for those decisions
 - Any subsequent actions required by SQT or any other party involved.
9. Complainants may appeal the outcome of their formal complaint within five working days of receipt of the communication, using the relevant appeal procedure, and must be advised of this at the point of communication of the decision.

8. FORMAL COMPLAINT APPEAL

Remit of Appeals Board – to include scope

1. The complainant must outline in writing why they wish to appeal the decision of the formal complaint procedure. This should be sent to the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.
2. An appeal may be submitted on the following grounds only:
 - i. Procedural Irregularity
 - ii. Inconsistent implementation of procedures
 - iii. Exceptional extenuating circumstances not previously reported
3. If the grounds for Appeal are valid, the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs convenes an Appeals Board to investigate the Appeal.
4. A meeting will be convened by the Appeals Board within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal.
5. The findings of the Appeals Board are issued to the complainant by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs within 10 working days of the meeting.

6. Should a complainant wish to appeal the result of the formal appeal they may do so via the Office the Ombudsman, 6 Earlsford Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 W773. www.ombudsman.ie

9. POLICY MONITORING

Responsibility	Frequency	Methods
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs – Document Update	Per QA audit schedule	- Review of documentation as set out in QAP2-1: Ongoing Review and Update of QA Documents.
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs	As necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Review of all Complaints applications made each academic year- Review of records of any relevant Appeals Board meeting minutes

10. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No	Approval Date	Description of Revision	Originator	Approved By
2.0	1/3/19	Complete revision and new document format	Senior Management Team	Academic Council
3.0	7/6/19	Policy and procedure broadened to include and account for other relationships within the organisation such as employers. Policy title changed from Learner Complaints to Complaints.	Senior Management Team	Academic Council
4.0	15/11/24	Minor text updates	Senior Management Team	Academic Council