



# HARTPURY

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

### Purpose

To ensure that formal complaints from complainants are responded to in a prompt and professional manner and are handled in a fair, impartial and non-confrontational manner.

### Definition

A formal complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more customers (including students) about Hartpury's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of Hartpury. Such a complaint must be in writing addressed to the Chief Operating Officer and should include evidence to substantiate the issues raised wherever possible.

This may be by letter: addressed to Lynn Forrester-Walker, Chief Operating Officer, Hartpury University and Hartpury College, Gloucester, GL19 3BE  
or via email addressed to: [complaints@hartpury.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@hartpury.ac.uk)

### Scope

1. This policy relates to all formal complaints relating to the work and services provided by Hartpury. Complainants can seek guidance as to whether their complaint falls under the scope of this policy by letter or email to the Chief Operating Officer (as above). The following matters are **not covered** by this policy:
  - a. Matters and issues that arose more than one academic term or semester (whichever is the greater) ago.
  - b. Exam results or academic judgement where a more appropriate form of redress would be the submission of an Academic Appeal.
  - c. Contractual disputes e.g. disputes that arise from a contractual agreement between the complainant and Hartpury.
  - d. Matters that are subject to legal action or where legal proceedings are the most appropriate way of resolving the dispute.
  - e. Dissatisfaction about the outcome of an academic misconduct or disciplinary process. This is covered by the Student Behaviour Management Policies and is subject to an appeal and is not a complaints process.
  - f. Matters explicitly relating to an organisation with its own complaints policy, where a more appropriate form of redress would be that organisation's own complaints policy, e.g. Student Loans Company, Students' Union or University of the West of England.
2. We will not investigate the following:
  - a. Complaints that are deemed by the Vice-Chancellor / Principal to be either vexatious or malicious.
  - b. Anonymous complaints.

- c. For students aged 18 and above, their permission is to be obtained before answering complaints raised by parents or guardians. Any communication with parents or guardians of student over 18 will be shared with the student too.
3. Complaints will be treated as confidential and the complainant's identity and the content and nature of the complaint will only be disclosed as necessary to facilitate the investigation of the complaint. If any named individual specifically wishes their identity to remain confidential for a specific audience this should be stated explicitly within the complaint. If maintaining this confidentiality means the complaint cannot be investigated the investigation will be suspended and the complainant informed.
4. If the complaint is from a group of individuals the group must nominate one person to be the spokesperson for the group, representing the group in all matters relating to the complaint.

### **Responsibilities**

1. The Chief Operating Officer is responsible for the overall operation of this policy. If unavailable, this responsibility will be delegated to a nominee from within the Executive of Hartpury. Members of senior staff nominated by the Chief Operating Officer are responsible for investigating and proposing suitable actions to address formal complaints made in accordance with this policy.

### **Method: Complaints**

1. All reasonably practicable steps to resolve complaints informally should be taken in the first instance.
2. To avoid any misunderstandings concerning the substance of a complaint, formal complaints must be in writing.
3. Complainants should use the formal complaints policy only in the event that issues raised through informal means, close to the source of the complaint, usually through their personal tutor, cannot be resolved.
4. Any evidence submitted with the complaint should be relevant to the complaint.
5. The responsibility for ensuring that the Chief Operating Officer receives a formal complaint rests with the person making the complaint. External complainants are advised that sending complaints by recorded delivery is recommended.
6. The Chief Operating Officer will acknowledge receipt of complaints received within three working days.
7. Each incoming form will be allocated a number which will be recorded in the Complaints Log.
8. The Chief Operating Officer will advise Executive Team members of complaints relevant to their areas of responsibility.
9. The written complaint will be investigated by the Chief Operating Officer, who has the option to pass to a member of the Hartpury Executive Team to assist.
10. The Chief Operating Officer or the member of the Hartpury Executive will investigate the complaint thoroughly and promptly, recording details and/or actions and maintaining other such written records as are appropriate. Within ten working days, a draft written response

to the complainant will be sent to the Chief Operating Officer. This timescale may be extended where a complaint is either complex or requires that a number of issues be addressed – in such circumstances the complainant will be informed of a likely timescale for a full response.

The Chief Operating Officer or member of the Hartpury Executive may request a meeting with the complainant to ensure that both they and the complainant understand the purpose and scope of the investigation, if this appears to be unclear to either party. The complainant has the right to be accompanied by an individual at this meeting. A record of the meeting will be made and agreed by both parties. If the complainant's expectations appear to go beyond what

Hartpury can reasonably provide they will be advised of this in writing, as soon as possible.

11. Within ten working days the Chief Operating Officer will provide a written response to the complainant. The complainant will also be provided with a summary of the information considered, a copy of this complaints policy (or details of how to find this on the Hartpury's website) drawing the complainant's attention to the appeals policy should they be dissatisfied with the response.
12. At the end of the investigation, the written complaint will be filed and the Complaints Log updated.
13. Regular reports of complaints and responses will be provided by the Chief Operating Officer to the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee of the Board of Governors.

### **Appeals of Complaint Outcome**

14. The complainant may submit a written appeal of the complaint outcome to the Vice-Chancellor / Principal within twenty working days of receiving the formal decision, with any new or additional evidence not previously considered
15. Upon receiving the appeal, the Vice-Chancellor / Principal will:
  - a. Acknowledge its receipt within three working days and indicate a timescale for the appeal to be considered/resolved.
  - b. Review the complaint in full, including Hartpury's response and the grounds cited for the appeal and decide the appropriate course of action. This may include:
    - i. upholding the appeal either in full or in part.
    - ii. dismissing the appeal citing the reasons for doing so.
    - iii. convening a panel to hear the appeal - normally consisting of the Vice-Chancellor / Principal (or nominee) and a member of the Executive Team.
16. If required, an appeal panel meeting will take place within twenty working days of the Vice-Chancellor /Principal's receipt of the notice of appeal. The complainant will be informed in writing of the appeal panel meeting at least ten working days before the proposed meeting date. The complainant will be provided with the names of panel members and their job titles, the names of anyone else attending, an outline of how the meeting will proceed and copies of relevant documents. The complainant will be allowed to attend and make representations at the meeting. The complainant has the right to be accompanied by an individual at this meeting. By agreement of all parties there may be a change in the time limits. Refusal of the complainant to attend should not invalidate the proceedings.
17. The appeal panel, in seeking to resolve the complaint, may adjourn the meeting or defer their decision until they are satisfied they have had the opportunity to take account of all relevant factors.

18. The decision of the appeal panel, any actions from the appeal panels decision and the reasons for that decision will be communicated to all parties and confirmed in writing within three working days. The decision reached by the appeal panel will be final.

### **Further Action**

If you are a Higher Education student who has complained, you will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter. The letter will explain whether the complainant has completed Hartpury's internal processes.

If the complainant is a student (past or present), or a parent, guardian or carer if the student concerned is under eighteen years of age, has completed the Hartpury Complaints Procedure and is dissatisfied with the way Hartpury has dealt with their complaint they may refer their complaint.

Complaints from a Higher Education student may be referred to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. More information about this can be found at [OIA](#)

Complaints from Further Education students may be referred to the Education Skills Funding Agency. More information about this can be found at [ESFA](#)

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

As with all Hartpury policies and procedures, due care has been taken to ensure that this policy is appropriate to all members of staff regardless of their age, disability, ethnicity, gender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender status.

The policy will be applied fairly and consistently whilst upholding Hartpury's commitment to providing equality to all. If any employee feels that this or any other policy does not meet this aim, please contact the HR Department.

Hartpury is committed towards promoting positive mental health by working towards the MINDFUL EMPLOYER Charter. Hartpury aims to create a culture of support within the workplace where employees can talk about mental health problems without the fear of stigma or discrimination.

### **Review Cycle**

Date Last Approved	November 2020
Policy Owner	Chief Operating Officer
Approving Committee	SMT
Status	Approved
Next Review Date	November 2021

### **RELATED DOCUMENTS**

#### **Complaints Log**

1. Student Handbook
2. Grievance Policy – Staff Handbook
3. FE Student Academic Behaviour Management Policy
4. Student non-academic Behaviour Management Policy.