

## UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

### SCHOOL OF LIFE AND MEDICAL SCIENCES

#### **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 policy has been approved by the School Academic Committee – Life and Medical Sciences on 14 July 2015 and 27 October 2015 (SAC-LMS Minutes 437.2, 14 July 2015 and 447.1.7, 27 October 2015 refer) and supersedes all previous versions.

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##### **Section 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 guidelines in the QAA Code of Practice for Placement Learning Section 9 (QAA 2007). 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 policy 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.
- 1.3 This policy 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 policy, 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 Policy to Promote Dignity & Respect as required. This may include support, advice or guidance from the student's personal tutor, programme tutor, link lecturer, medical or counselling services and disability officers. If there is any uncertainty regarding the policy that should be implemented, advice must be sought from the relevant Host Manager and/or the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance.
- 1.4 Students who are employed by another organisation, e.g. 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 policy. 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.

- 1.5 The procedure for raising and escalating concerns about a placement (whistle-blowing) relating to malpractice or wrongdoing is contained under Appendix 1 of the Bribery and Corruption policy (version 03.0 UPR GV12). Section 2 of this procedure refers to students and paragraph 2.5 specifically outlines how students should raise concerns whilst on placement. This includes a whistle-blowing hotline number. Students needing to raise a concern/whistle-blow about their placement must inform their mentor/practice teacher/practice educator and follow the placement provider's raising and escalating concerns/whistle-blowing process. Students should also inform their programme tutor or university placement link tutor as soon as possible. If their programme tutor is unavailable then the student must inform their personal tutor.

## **Section 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.
- 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 All complaints will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible and 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 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 will monitor and analyse the number and range of complaints received within the School on an annual basis. The policy will be reviewed bi-annually.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Academic staff will encourage a sensitive and constructive approach to addressing all matters dealt with under this procedure. Staff will ensure that complaints are 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 feel that this would be in the student's best interests due to the nature of the complaint.
- 2.6 The student will normally be supported at any meeting by a University representative such as a link lecturer/programme tutor/disability officer 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 will attend in a purely advisory capacity, i.e. as a friend/supporter.
- 2.7 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.

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 The School will nominate a member of academic staff the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance to monitor and collate complaints about practice across the School.

### Section 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**

#### 3.0 Stage 1 – Local procedure

- 3.1 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 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 recommendations 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 Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance, the programme tutor 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 Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance, the programme tutor 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 policy must be applied.

#### 4.0 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 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 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 be directly involved with the complainant or the subject matter of the complaint but will normally be from within the same Department.
- 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 within 15 working days of the completion of the investigation. If the investigator is the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance they must report back to the Associate Dean, Academic Quality Assurance. The Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance 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, the programme tutor and a copy placed in the student's file within ten working days of the review meeting taking place.
- 5.0 **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 policy is deemed more appropriate or needs to be implemented simultaneously, then the procedure identified in that policy will be applied.
- 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 policy, UPR SA05 (Student complaints).
- 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, the relevant Strategic Health Authority.
- 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.

**6.0 Monitoring of Proceedings**

6.1 The Dean of School in consultation with the Senior Executive Group will appoint a Complaints Auditor for the School. The auditor will normally be the the Associate Dean of School, Academic Quality Assurance.

6.2 A full report of complaints managed by the programme officers will be sent to the School Complaints Auditor by 31 July each year. The template for the report is to be found in **Appendix 1**.

6.3 The School Complaints Auditor will submit an annual report by 31 August each year to the Dean of School. This will include data accessed through the Student Record System analysed by gender, age, ethnicity and disability. The School Complaints Auditor will 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

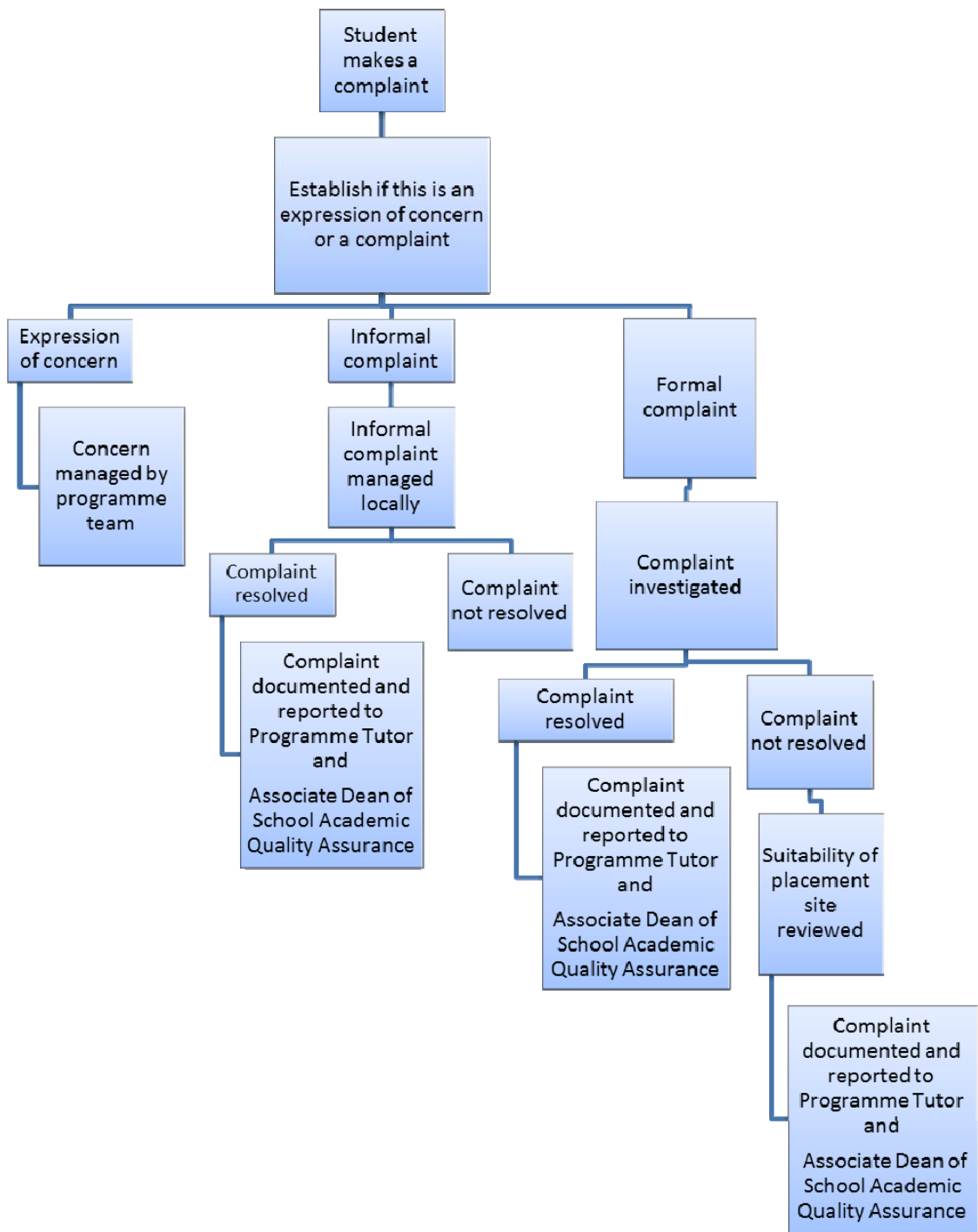
- Serious inadequacies or absence in mentoring/supervision
- Refusal to acknowledge and/or address concerns raised by previous complaints
- Inappropriate behaviour towards student
- Failure to acknowledge equality and diversity issues

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

- Failure to uphold health and safety procedures
- Harrassment and bullyingHarrassment or bullying

**SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT PROCEDURE**

**APPENDIX 2**



**PRACTICE PLACEMENT COMPLAINTS REPORT TEMPLATE** (To be completed by Programme Officer)

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

**Date of Report:**

Student's programme of Study	Seniority of Student (please identify by year of study)	Ethnicity	SHA funding source (if appropriate)	Summary of Complaint (Please outline)	Nature resolution/outcome