

BACKSTAGE ACADEMY

Student Complaints

Student Complaints Procedure

About this procedure

1. Backstage Academy values the views of its students highly, and therefore aims to manage complaints in a way that is sensitive to the needs of each specific case, and supportive of the Academy's goal of providing the best possible student experience. There are several informal channels through which it is hoped that most problems can be resolved. If, however, you need to pursue a complaint formally, Backstage Academy will treat it seriously and impartially, on the basis set out in this document.
2. The Student Complaints Procedures have been developed as part of Backstage Academy's commitment to ensuring the quality and standards of its programmes of study, academic services and facilities. They aim to provide a clear and impartial process for handling student complaints within a reasonable timescale and with due regard to the spirit of natural justice, and that you and staff members clearly understand:
 - the grounds on which you can make a complaint
 - the process for making a complaint
 - what other steps you are able to take
3. These policies and procedures **do not** cover complaints relating to:
 - Applications
 - Academic misconduct
 - Decisions relating to progression, academic assessment and awards
4. The policy and procedures follow the guidance published by the Office for the Independent Adjudicator and aligns with both the OIA Good Practice Framework (2016) and with the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2018).

What is a complaint?

5. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about Backstage Academy's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider
6. A complaint is different from an academic appeal, which is a request for a review of a decision made by an Assessment Board charged with making decisions on student progression, assessment and award. The Student Complaints Procedure cannot change a decision made by an Assessment Board.

What kind of complaints can be considered?

7. Grounds for complaint might include:
 - i. Dissatisfaction with standards of academic provision (for example, the basic academic framework such as course design, content and structure; resources and facilities; arrangements for assessment; and information provided to you about your course).
 - ii. Dissatisfaction with the quality of supervision and tuition.
 - iii. Failure to meet obligations (such as those set out in the Prospectus, the Partnership Agreement, and the Equality and Diversity Policy – or assurances which may have been given to you on an individual basis).
 - iv. Deficiencies in standards of service (which might include problems with support facilities or administrative services).
 - v. Harassment, bullying and victimisation.
 - vi. Other deficiencies in the quality of your learning experience.

Exclusions

8. Complaints which:
 - Have already been investigated and dealt with;
 - Are outside of the scope of this procedure;
 - Are made without disclosing adequate grounds;
 - Have been disposed of in court or tribunal proceedings or under a settlement agreement between the complainant and Backstage Academy;
 - Are malicious, vexatious or frivolous;
 - Are repetitive or harassing;
 - Where students or their representatives are aggressive, offensive or abusive, or where demands are unreasonable in nature or unreasonably persistent;

will not be dealt with under this Procedure.

In addition, complaints which concern the competence or conduct of other enrolled students will be responded to through the Non-Academic Conduct and Disciplinary Policy or other most relevant procedure.

Who can make a complaint?

9. These procedures are intended for use by registered or enrolled students of Backstage Academy or those who have recently left Backstage Academy subject to the timeframes outlined in the procedures below. You must submit a complain yourself, and Backstage Academy will only consider complaints from a third party in exceptional circumstances.
10. A complainant should be a registered student of Backstage Academy, although a student who has withdrawn or left Backstage Academy can invoke the procedure within 28 days of their leaving.

11. Where a complaint is raised by a number of students, it can be dealt with as one collective complaint, in the following circumstances:
 - i. the case is conducted through a lead student to facilitate the progress of the complaint;
 - ii. the names of all students who wish to bring the complaint forward are disclosed to Backstage Academy on a Group Complaint Consent Form and to confirm that the student nominated as the lead student will act as the facilitator for the complaint during all stages of the Procedure.

The complaints process

Stage 1 - Early resolution/Informal Procedure

12. Generally, complaints are most easily resolved if they are raised at the time the problem first occurs and with the person/s directly involved. Often, you will be able to resolve your complaint simply by discussing it with a relevant staff member, with your personal tutor, or an appropriate course representative.
13. Where the subject of the complaint lies outside of the remit of the staff member with whom it has been raised, you may seek the advice of the Registry Manager or Director of Operations and Student Services via complaints@backstage-academy.co.uk who may determine that a different member of staff should investigate the concern raised. The investigating officer will normally arrange a meeting with you, in order to establish as much detail as possible about the case and establish the outcome you are seeking. This may take place by phone call or email exchange if either party is unable to be onsite within a reasonable timeframe.
14. The investigating officer or person you have addressed the informal complaint to will aim to respond within 10 working days of receipt of the notification of the concern. They will arrive at judgement and may propose a resolution to your grievance(s). They will also inform you how to take the complaint to the next stage of the - process if you are unhappy with the outcome and should you wish to do so.

Staff responding to informal complaints should do so using a Stage 1 – Complaint Record Form (available via the Moodle Student Hub alongside this procedure).

Stage 2 - Formal Procedure

15. If you are unhappy with the outcome of the early resolution stage, you may take your complaint to the Formal Stage of this procedure. You should submit your formal complaint within 10 working days of receiving the informal written response.
16. In exceptional circumstances it may be appropriate for students to progress directly to Stage 2 of the Procedure without first attempting internal resolution at Stage 1. Examples of when this might be appropriate include complex, serious or sensitive complaint issues which require a detailed investigation.

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17. Your formal complaint must be submitted in writing using a Stage 2 Complaint Form and should explain why you are unhappy with any previous response(s). The complaint will be assessed to ensure that it fits within the scope (i.e. it would be better considered under another procedure and/or is within the timeframe outlined in this document.)

Stage 2 Complaint forms are available via the Moodle Student Hub alongside this procedure. Group Complaint Forms are also available if you are lead representative on behalf of other students, as you will require their consent to do so.

18. Your Stage 2 Complaint Form should be sent to the complaints@backstage-academy.co.uk and include the following information:

- i. your name and student ID number
 - ii. details of the course you are – or were –studying
 - iii. details of the main issue of concern
 - iv. an outline of any informal discussions which have already taken place to resolve the issue (including the names of any staff involved and any relevant dates) and why you are unhappy with the outcome of the informal stage of the procedure
- i. a summary of the resolution/outcome you are seeking
 - ii. any other supporting information (such as, for example, copies of correspondence which you feel illustrates your complaint)

19. Your complaint will be allocated a Stage 2 Investigating Officer, who is unrelated to the case. You will be advised of the name and contact details of the Investigating Officer, who will normally meet or communicate with you to discuss the matter in further detail.

20. It is anticipated that the investigation of most Stage 2 complaints will be completed within 21 working days of the appointment of the Investigating Officer. If there is any delay in the process you will be informed by the Investigating Officer or their nominee.

21. The investigating officer may seek to resolve the issue:

- on the basis of the documentation,
- having sought further information from the members of staff involved in the original complaint
- may call a hearing at which you and any other persons involved may submit their respective cases. Both you and any person who is the subject of the complaint may each be accompanied at any such hearing by another member of the Backstage Academy Community.

22. At any stage in the proceedings of a formal case, and in order to try to resolve the issue, both parties should consider the role of mediation. If however, mediation proves unsuccessful, the proceedings would revert back to the stage at which mediation was attempted.

23. The Investigating Officer will write to you with details of the outcome and any action that Backstage Academy intends to take. The written response will state whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or rejected and the reason(s) for this decision.

Stage 3 – Review

If you remain unsatisfied after Stage 2, you can choose to request a review of the decision. There are two routes that this may be progressed through, depending on whether the complaint concerns:

- **Service Provision.** This is essentially the delivery of the course, and encompasses complaints about specific incidents occurring on campus, student support, members of staff, timetabling and other responsibilities of Backstage Academy as a teaching provider.
- **Academic Quality and Standards.** This includes complaints regarding course content or structure, resources, facilities or information provided about the course.

Stage 3: Route 1 – Complaints concerning Service Provision

24. You have the right to request a review of the decision made by the Complaints Officer. Reviews will be considered by the Appeals and Review Board. The Appeals/Review Board will not rehear the case afresh but shall:
 - i. review the procedures followed to date
 - ii. establish whether any new evidence that is material and substantial has been presented which for valid reason was not available the Investigating Officer;
 - iii. Consider whether the outcome was reasonable and appropriate under the circumstances.
25. Notice of your request for review should be sent to complaints@backstage-academy.co.uk using a Stage 3 Complaint Form (available via the Moodle Student Hub alongside this procedure) within 10 working days of the dispatch of the decision at Stage 2. You may submit a written statement for consideration by the Appeals Board
26. The Appeals and Review Board will normally meet following receipt of your request for review. The manner in which the review shall be conducted, and the evidence heard will be entirely at the discretion of the Chair of the Board or their nominee and in accordance with the terms of reference for the Appeals and Review Board.
27. Having reviewed the case, the Appeals and Review Board may:
 - i. confirm the original decision
 - ii. uphold your appeal and substitute its own decision for the original one.
28. You will be normally be notified in writing of the Appeals and Review Board's decision within 10 working days of that decision being made. You will be informed if there has been a delay in the Review Process.
29. The decision of the Appeals and Review Board is final and there is no further process for review within Backstage Academy. You will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter. This provides you with formal confirmation that you have completed all available stages of the Academy's internal procedures.

Stage 3: Route 2 – Complaints concerning Academic Quality and Standards

30. In accordance with the University of Bolton’s Student Complaints Policy – Annex A, Stage 3 (Review) will be conducted by the University of Bolton for all complaints that concern academic quality and standards (see definition at top of previous page).
31. The deadline for submitting a request for review by the university in these circumstances is no later than 14 days from the date on which Backstage Academy responded with the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint.
32. A request for review should be made using a University of Bolton Stage 3 Complaint Review Form, which is available via the University of Bolton Policy Zone¹. Guidance can be found in section 8.3 of the UoB Student Complaints Policy.
33. On completion of Stage 3 Review by the University of Bolton, they will send you a Completion of Procedures Letter.

Can I get a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter if I don’t complete all three stages of the Complaints Procedure?

You will only be automatically granted a COP letter after completing all three stages. The OIA will usually decline to review cases which have not been granted a COP letter and refer complainants back to the internal process. However, if you have missed the deadline to progress your case to the next stage or there are not sufficient grounds to request review at Stage 3, you may request a COP. Note that this will not be issued automatically and if you are requesting a COP letter after a deadline for review, the letter will be dated to that deadline.

Further action

34. If after your review at Stage 3 of the Backstage Academy or University of Bolton process, you are still dissatisfied with the decision, you may be able to request an independent review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), provided the complaint is eligible under its rules. Should you decide to make a pursue this with the OIA, the OIA Complaint Form must be received by the OIA within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter.
35. Information about the role of the OIA and the procedure for submitting complaints can be obtained from the OIA website: www.oiahe.org.uk
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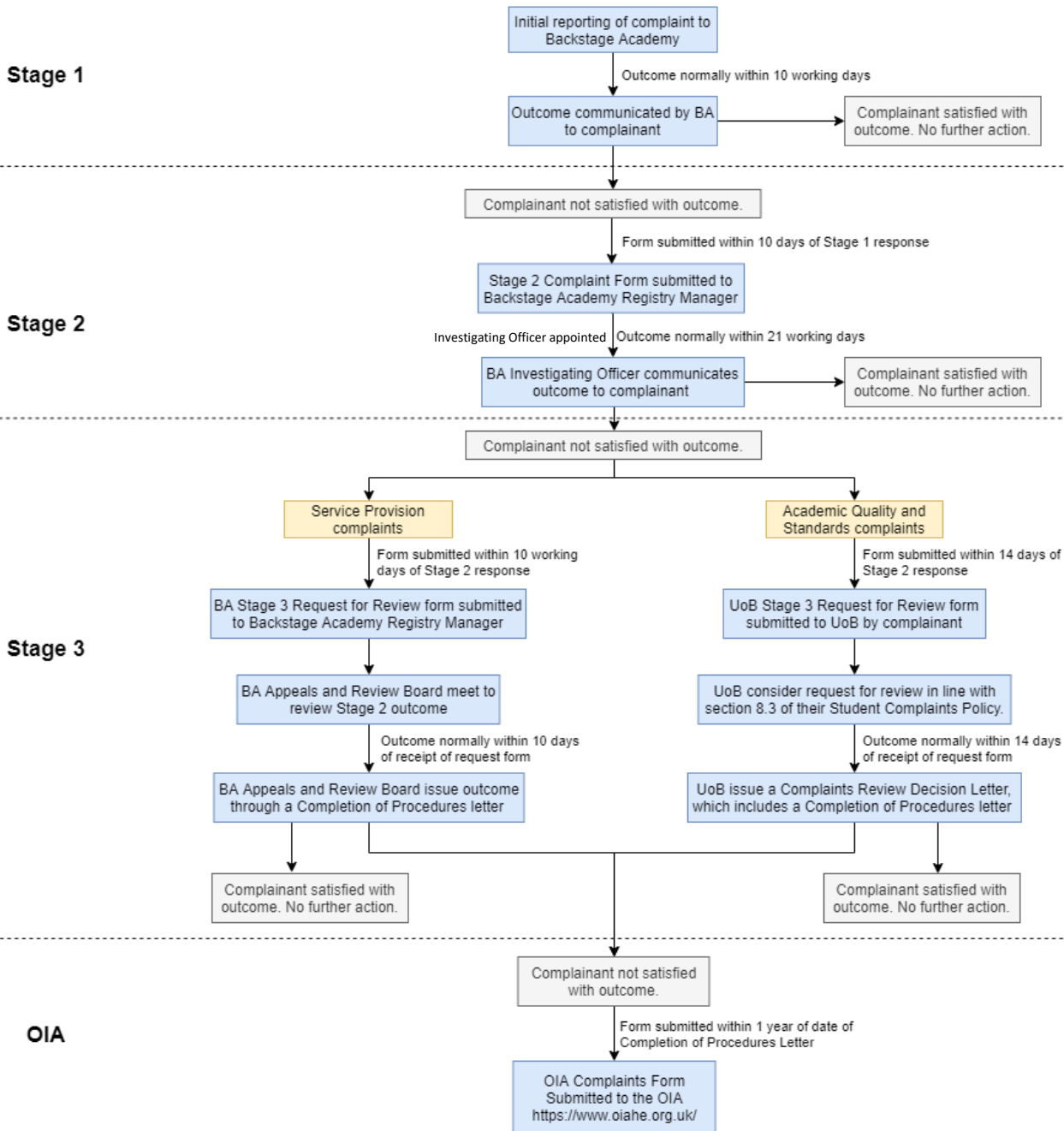
Monitoring

37. A report of all complaints and requests for review is presented annually to Academic Board and the Partnership Meeting for the purpose of monitoring, quality assurance and enhancement

¹ <https://www.bolton.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/student-policies/> >> General Policies and Procedures >> Student Complaints Procedure, Guidance and Forms 2019-20

ANNEX A – Overview of the Backstage Academy Student Complaints Procedure

Student Complaints Procedure



DOCUMENT CONTROL	
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