

## Applicant Complaints and Appeals Policy

### 1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 The University of Northampton strives to achieve high quality in all its interactions with applicants. There will, however, be times when an applicant feels dissatisfied with the service and wishes to complain. The arrangements for handling complaints described herein are in line with UK Quality Code, reflecting the principles of natural justice, being as transparent and open as confidentiality issues permit.

### 2. Purpose and scope

- 2.1 The Applicant Complaint and Appeal Policy is ultimately the responsibility of Senate, devolved to the Head of Admissions and Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing.
- 2.2 This Policy covers all applicants for all University of Northampton courses, including those delivered through Partners. Where the admissions process is devolved to a Partner, the Head of Student Admissions will normally appoint an investigator from that Partner organisation in the first instance.
- 2.3 Complaints and appeals will be handled with due consideration to confidentiality for both students and staff. Any person named in a complaint will be informed of its substance and will have the right to contribute to any investigation. Information contained within the complaint will be made available only to those members of staff involved in its resolution.
- 2.4 No applicant bringing a complaint or appeal under this policy, whether successfully or otherwise, will be treated less favourably by any member of staff than if the complaint/appeal had not been brought. If evidence to the contrary is found in this regard the member of staff concerned may be subject to disciplinary proceedings under the relevant University policy.

### 3.0 Definitions

- 3.1 For the purposes of this Policy, a 'complaint' is defined as the expression of a specific concern on the application of admissions procedures or a related admissions service.
- 3.2 For the purposes of this Policy, an 'appeal' is defined as a request for a review of a decision concerning selection or admission and can be lodged only after such a decision has been made.

- 3.3 For the purposes of this policy, where an individual role is named this refers to that role or a nominee.

#### **4.0 Key principles**

- 4.1 Complaints/appeals should be made no more than ten days after the notification date of the initial decision made by the University of Northampton, unless there is a good reason for the delay.
- 4.2 Appeals and complaints will not be accepted against the academic and/or professional judgment of the University (e.g. validity of prior qualifications, interview or audition decisions).
- 4.3 Appeals and complaints will not be accepted regarding legitimate occupational health issues or decisions made because of criminal convictions except in exceptional circumstances.
- 4.4 Complaints/appeals made anonymously or by a third party will not be considered except in exceptional circumstances.
- 4.5 There is an expectation that appeals and complaints will be attempted to be resolved informally in the first instance, with this policy only instigated where such informal resolution has not proved to be satisfactory.
- 4.6 Records will be kept in relation to the nature and outcome of complaints and appeals, the time taken to resolve them and equal opportunities issues such as gender and ethnic origin of complainants/appellants.
- 4.7 Applicants should feel confident that they can make genuine submissions without fear of any reprisal.
- 4.8 Privacy and confidentiality will be assured unless disclosure is necessary to progress the complaint or appeal. The demand for confidentiality may make it difficult for a specific complaint to be dealt with. If confidentiality is a problem, the complainant may discuss with the Head of Admissions how their complaint/appeal may be dealt with. In accordance with good practice in the sector, and within its jurisdiction, the University will facilitate access to documentation and information that is material to a complaint.
- 4.9 If a complaint/appeal is made by an applicant who is under the age of 18, unless it is the applicant's express wish that this should not be done, the University will notify the parents or guardians of the applicant in writing and keep them informed of the progress of the complaint/appeal. The University will permit the parents or guardians of the applicant to act on their behalf during the process, provided the applicant has confirmed agreement beforehand.

- 4.10 The University has guidance on the use of compensation and/or refunds in cases of applicant complaints.

## **5. Complaint/Appeal Handling Procedure**

- 5.1 If an applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of his/her application, has attempted informal resolution and considers the outcome from that informal resolution to be unsatisfactory, h/she is entitled to make a formal complaint/appeal, using the designated Applicant Complaint/Appeal Form. The complainant/appellant should detail the issue, any steps already taken to resolve the issue, the reasons why they remain dissatisfied and the desired outcome(s).
- 5.2 The Head of Admissions or Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing will appoint an investigator to consider the appeal/complaint.
- 5.3 Where a member of staff is named in a complaint, he/she will be provided with a copy of the complaint and will be invited to provide a written response, which will be considered in arriving at a conclusion. The complainant may also be interviewed.
- 5.4 The investigation into a complaint/appeal will normally be concluded within one month of its receipt; the investigator will submit a written report to the Head of Admissions or Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing. This report will include:
- In the opinion of the investigator, whether the complaint is justified. If it is justified then the investigator should recommend a resolution. This resolution may or may not be that requested by the complainant.
  - Any recommendations to prevent similar problems arising in the future.
- 5.5 The Head of Admissions or Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing will communicate the outcome formally to the complainant; this outcome notification marks the end of the University's Applicant Complaint & Appeal Policy.
- 5.6 The decision of the Head of Admissions or Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing is final.
- 5.7 Where a member of staff has been named in the complaint or involved in the investigation he/she will also be informed of the outcome.
- 5.8 Admissions complaints are not currently subject to oversight by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (See

<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/complaints-the-oia-cannot-look-at.aspx>).

5.9 Where the Head of Admissions has a conflict of interest in the case under consideration, the investigation will be managed by the Academic Registrar or Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing, who will also make the decision on the outcome of the complaint/appeal.

## **6.0 Key responsibilities**

6.1 Head of Admissions or Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing will:

- Maintain oversight of process;
- Communicate outcomes of investigation to applicant.

6.2 The Head of Admissions will maintain oversight when the complaint/appeal relates to applications processed by his/her team (Home UG and PGT Admissions, All PGR admissions, All DL admissions, All Partner admissions)

6.3 The Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing will maintain oversight when the complaint/appeal relates to applications processed by his/her team (Overseas UG and PGT Admissions)

6.4 The Academic Registrar or Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing will maintain oversight where Head of Admissions or Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing has a conflict of interest. The split between the Academic Registrar and the Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing mirrors that between the Head of Admissions and the Head of International Student Recruitment & Marketing.

## **7.0 Links to related external documents (e.g. QAA)**

7.1 UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance

## **8.0 Links to internal documents**

8.1 University guidance on compensation and refunds

## **9.0 Appendices**

9.1 Summary Sheet

**Summary Sheet:**

<b>Policy Title:</b>	
Applicant Complaints and Appeals Policy	
<b>Purpose of Policy and to whom it applies (please specify cohorts):</b>	
<p>To set out how and when applicants to University of Northampton courses can complain against the application of admissions procedures or a related admissions service, or request a review of a decision concerning selection or admission</p> <p>Students applying to courses run in collaboration with others (EWO) should use this policy if they wish to make an applicant appeal or complaint.</p>	
<b>Owner and Department:</b>	
Dawn Mains, Head of Admissions, Student & Academic Services	
<b>Principal contact:</b>	
Dawn Mains	
<b>Dissemination and implementation plan:</b>	
Via SEC and SSECs On Web	
<b>Date of initial committee approval (state committee name):</b>	December 2014
<b>Date of Senate approval:</b>	December 2014
<b>Date for implementation and cohorts to which it applies:</b>	December 2014
<b>Proposed date of annual update:</b>	June 2022
<b>Date of last annual update:</b>	June 2023
<b>Proposed date of full review:</b>	June 2024
<b>Date of last full review:</b>	June 2020
<b>Version number and date:</b>	4.0 (June 2018)