



# HARTPURY

## Complaints Policy

| APPROVAL & REVIEW CYCLE |                         |               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Policy Owner/Reviewer   | Chief Operating Officer | November 2025 |
| Approved By             | Exec                    | November 2025 |
|                         | QUEST                   | January 2026  |
| Interim-Review          | No                      | -             |
| Next Review Date        |                         | November 2027 |

## Purpose

To ensure that formal complaints are responded to in a prompt and professional manner and are handled in a fair, impartial and non-confrontational manner and used to inform and improve our practice.

## 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, made in writing using the form available on the Hartpury Website ( See link here : [Complaints | Hartpury University & Hartpury College](#) ). Use of this form ensures the complaint can be understood more easily, is more likely to contain the information required to assess whether the dissatisfaction is within scope of the policy and helps ensure that the requested outcome is considered when the complaint is investigated. (If an individual is unable to use the form for any reason they should contact [complaints@hartpury.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@hartpury.ac.uk) for guidance or 01452 702 100 for more information.

Consideration of a complaint will include consideration of whether procedures were followed, procedures were reasonable, evidence used in decision making, any delays in process, communication and discrimination issues.

The Complainant is referred to as you throughout the policy.

## Scope

Where a member of staff wishes to raise a complaint which relates to their role this should be taken through the appropriate HR process. Please contact HR for further guidance on this.

1. You can seek guidance as to whether your complaint falls under the scope of this policy by email to [Complaints@Hartpury.ac.uk](mailto:Complaints@Hartpury.ac.uk).
2. 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 you 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. These are covered by other policies and are subject to an appeal process set out in those policies and 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.
  - g. Matters subject to ongoing investigation with an external regulatory body.

3. We will not investigate the following:

Complaints that are deemed by the Vice-Chancellor / Executive Principal to be either vexatious or malicious. Hartpury understands that if you make a complaint then it is of concern to you no matter what others might think. However, Hartpury reserves the right to consider a complaint vexatious if:

- Complaints are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious
- There is an insistence in pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
- There is an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner or with an unrealistic outcome targeted.
- The complaints are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.

Please be aware:

- If a complaint is judged to be malicious or vexatious, you may be subject to disciplinary procedures.
- If your programme of study leads to professional registration you may be referred to the Professional Suitability Process.
- If your behaviour is a cause for concern and where we consider that there may be an underlying problem, you may be referred under the Fitness to Study Procedure.

**Anonymous complaints.** Complaints require investigation to enable resolution. Where a complaint is made anonymously, it will not be possible to undertake such an investigation. For practical reasons therefore, no action will normally be taken in the event of a complaint made anonymously. However relevant data will be collected and kept as a record of issues to help inform and improve practice. An alternative may be the Public Interest Disclosure Act (Whistleblowing) process.

**Complaints made on your behalf – please note:**

For students aged 18 years and above, your permission will be obtained before answering complaints raised by your parents or guardians. Any communication with parents or guardians of students over 18 years will be shared with you, the student too.

For students under 18 a parent or carer may raise a complaint on your behalf.

**Please note:**

**Your Identity** - Your identity and the content and nature of the complaint will only be disclosed as necessary to facilitate the investigation of the complaint. If you specifically wish your 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 you will be informed.

**Complaints against a member of staff** - If a complaint refers to a specific member of staff, the complaint will be considered with the support and guidance from the HR Department to ensure the appropriate policy is followed. The staff member will be kept informed at all stages and will have the right to make representations as part of the investigation or in response to the proposed outcome of the complaint. A complaint against a member of staff will initially be investigated in line with this procedure. However, it may also be necessary to refer such a complaint to the HR department, particularly where the complaint is relevant to another Hartpury policy. In these

instances the feedback on the complaint may be limited to respect GDPR requirements, but you would be updated when this is the case.

**Students enrolled with Hartpury and a partner organisation** - you would normally be expected to use the complaints policy from the organisation you are registered with. Please note that Hartpury shares information about complaints with partner organisations to support appropriate investigation and joint learning. For example, if you are a Postgraduate Research student enrolled with Hartpury and UWE Bristol then you would be expected to use the Hartpury Complaints Policy for formal complaints, however you may pursue a complaint through UWE Bristol Complaints Procedure where the complaint meets the requirements of that procedure and is focussed on a UWE Bristol service. If you are unsure which applies to you then please contact [student.advisors@hartpury.ac.uk](mailto:student.advisors@hartpury.ac.uk) and this can be confirmed for you.

## **Process**

When submitting a complaint it is important you include all relevant points in chronological order but be succinct. Unnecessary detail or unclear information could prolong the time taken to consider a complaint.

When submitting a complaint you should be clear and realistic about the outcome you are seeking. It will be more difficult to address your complaint if your goal is not clear or you are asking for something which is not possible.

If you are part of a group of individuals making a complaint the group must nominate one person to be the spokesperson for the group, representing the group in all matters relating to the complaint. This does not mean that all of you within a group of complaints will receive the same outcome, where circumstances differ in a substantive way potentially a different outcome may be reached.

This Policy is intended to be clear, transparent, and fair to all parties. All complaints which are made in good faith will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated. Students who raise complaints in good faith will never be disadvantaged or treated less favourably, regardless of the outcome.

All parties involved in a complaint regardless of their part in the process will be treated equally and fairly.

## **Responsibilities Within The Process**

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

### Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

1. All reasonably practicable steps to resolve complaints informally should be taken in the first instance.

The contacts for different types of issues are set out below:

### Stage 1 – Local Resolution

Before an official complaint is submitted you should raise your dissatisfaction with the team immediately involved as they may be able to resolve the issue more quickly.

*Suggested Areas to Support Local Resolution:*

**Academic and Pastoral Matters** – It is expected that issues would be raised in the first instance with the tutor. Where a matter is not resolved it should then progress:

(a) College Students – to the personal tutor or the manager of the relevant department.

(b) University Students – through the University Student Academic Concern Procedure (available through the Moodle learning environment)

**Financial Matters** – raise with finance team - email [feequestions@hartpury.ac.uk](mailto:feequestions@hartpury.ac.uk)

**Student Experience Issues** – raise with the Student Union and your Student Representatives (Reps)  
- The role of a Student Rep is to communicate the views of students to the appropriate members of staff; the matters raised by Student Reps are those that affect students' academic experiences such as feedback regarding the content of a module, course, or programme. Further information on this is available from the Students' Union. If you would like to submit feedback relating to broad issues of University or College policy or procedure, please contact your your Students' Union Representative.

**Transport Matters** – raise with our transport supplier in the first instance (see schedule).

**Catering Matters** – raise with our catering supplier in the first instance. (see schedule).

**Apprenticeships** – raise with the Hartpury Apprenticeship Team Hartpury

**Work Placement** -- If you are a student on placement, you should use the complaints procedure of your placement provider if you have a complaint relating to aspects of your placement itself, keeping Hartpury informed, as set out in your work placement guidance . You are however also free to pursue a complaint through the Hartpury Complaints Policy if the complaint refers to an aspect over which Hartpury has authority and the power to deliver a remedy.

**If local resolution does not resolve the matter it may then be taken through this complaint process, where it falls within its scope.**

2. You should use the **formal complaints policy** only in the event that issues raised through informal means, close to the source of the complaint, , cannot be resolved. **If you have not raised a complaint informally then your complaint may be referred to the informal procedure prior to being considered as a formal complaint. You will be advised if this is the case.**

## Stage 2 – Formal Complaint Process

1. To avoid any misunderstandings concerning the substance of a complaint, formal complaints must be via the complaints form found on the Hartpury website (<https://www.hartpury.ac.uk/about-us/governance-leadership/complaints/>)<sup>1</sup>
2. Any evidence submitted with the complaint should be relevant to the complaint. Evidence is submitted separate from the online complaints form and has to be provided within 48hrs of the online form completion.
3. On submitting the online complaints form, you will receive an automated response advising that the Chief Operating Officer will acknowledge receipt within three working days via email.
4. Each incoming complaint form will be allocated a number which will be recorded in the Complaints Log.
5. The incoming complaint form will be reviewed:
  - To identify if it is within the scope of the policy - if it is not within the scope of this policy then you will be informed that investigation will not proceed.
  - To confirm that it has previously been raised at a local level - if this has not happened it will be reviewed to identify if it should be transferred to another area and you will be advised where this is the outcome.
  - To identify if the complaint and the requested outcome is clear – if this is not the case clarification will be sought from you. The Complaint response timeline will commence once the clarification has been provided and acknowledged

*These steps should be undertaken within 5 working days, subject to the clarification requirement above, and you will be advised whether the complaint will be investigated in accordance with this policy, and of the expected timeline for response, generally 20 working days unless it is classified as complex as set out below.*

6. The Chief Operating Officer will advise Executive Team members of complaints relevant to their areas of responsibility.
7. The complaint will be investigated by the Chief Operating Officer, who has the option to pass to the complaint to a nominee, who is independent of the matter, to investigate.
8. Where the Chief Operating Officer identifies a complaint or complaints that require early resolution, they may decide to expedite that complaint under this policy, which means they will do all they can to investigate and consider the complaint quickly. Complaints which may be expedited include complaints which involve serious harm, potential adverse impact to wellbeing or health or those which involve serious or highly sensitive issues. In deciding whether to expedite a complaint the Chief Operating Officer must balance the fairness to all parties of a full and fair investigation against the need for swift resolution. A complaint of this nature may be referred to another team, for example safeguarding or wellbeing, or another policy, for example student or staff disciplinary processes. You would be updated on this position as is appropriate within the requirements of data protection requirements.

9. The Chief Operating Officer or delegated investigator will investigate the complaint thoroughly and promptly, recording details and/or actions and maintaining other such written records as are appropriate. **The response timescale may be extended where a complaint is either complex or requires a number of issues be addressed – in such circumstances you will be informed of a likely timescale for a full response**

The Chief Operating Officer or delegated investigator may request a meeting with you to ensure that both they and you understand the purpose and scope of the investigation, if this appears to be unclear to either party. You have the right to be accompanied by a companion at this meeting. Appendix A sets out the support students can access whilst making a complaint. A record of the meeting will be made and agreed by both parties. If your expectations appear to go beyond what Hartpury can reasonably provide, you will be advised of this in writing, as soon as possible.

10. Within twenty working days, following the issuing of the complaint acknowledgement response, the Chief Operating Officer will provide a written response to you. You 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 your attention to when and how the outcome can be appealed should you be dissatisfied with the response.
11. Where a complaint leads to a change of practice you will be updated on this within the complaint 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 and the Academic Registrar to the Quality Enhancement and Standards Committees of the Board of Governors.

### Stage 3 - Appeal Of Complaint Outcome

1. You may submit a written appeal of the complaint outcome to the Vice-Chancellor / Executive Principal within twenty working days of receiving the formal decision of the complaint.

#### Grounds for Appeal

- a. Additional Evidence - Any appeal **must provide additional evidence, with reasons why it has not been previously provided, that has not been considered to date as a prerequisite for consideration.**

and/or

- b. Belief Flaw in Process or Outcome Manifestly Unreasonable - an appeal may also be made on the basis the complaint believes that there was a flaw in the process and/or that the outcome was manifestly unreasonable.

Clear and specific grounds for appeal are helpful in ensuring that you can demonstrate your case is different from the complaint consideration.

2. Upon receiving the appeal, the Vice-Chancellor/Executive Principal will:
  - a. Acknowledge its receipt within three working days and indicate a timescale for the appeal to be considered/resolved. Generally this would be within 30 working days, but may vary depending on circumstances
  - 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/Executive Principal (or nominee) and a member of the Executive Team, neither of which will have been involved in the original investigation.
3. If required, an appeal panel meeting will generally take place within twenty working days of the Vice-Chancellor/Executive Principal's receipt of the notice of appeal. You will be informed in writing of the appeal panel meeting at least ten working days before the proposed meeting date. You 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. You will be allowed to attend and make representations at the meeting. It is your right to be accompanied by an individual at this meeting. If you refuse to attend this does not invalidate the proceedings.
4. 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.
5. The decision of the appeal panel, any actions from the appeal panel 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, or were, a HE student a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued to you once Hartpury's internal complaints procedure has been completed.

If you are dissatisfied with the way Hartpury has dealt with your complaint at the end of this procedure then you may choose to refer your complaint to an independent body.

If you are (or were) a Higher Education student then you may pursue your complaint through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. More information about this can be found at the [OIA](https://www.oiahe.org.uk/) website at the URL: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>. They are an independent sector body and not part of the Hartpury Complaints process.

If you are (or were) a Further Education student then you may pursue your complaint through the Department for Education. More information about this can be found on the DfE website. They are an independent sector body and not part of the Hartpury Complaints process.

## **Freedom Of Speech**

As part of this policy, Hartpury reaffirms its commitment to the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom, in accordance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and guidance from the Office for Students (OfS). Hartpury will take all reasonably practicable steps to secure the right to express lawful views and engage in open debate without fear of censorship or institutional discipline for staff, students, and visiting speakers. In addition, this policy prohibits the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in any situation that would prevent staff from speaking out about misconduct, harassment, or other matters of public interest.

## **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 and students 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 or student feels that this or any other policy does not meet this aim, please contact the HR Department (staff) or an academic tutor (student).

Hartpury is committed towards promoting positive mental health by working towards the MINDFUL EMPLOYER Charter, holds the Student Minds University Mental Health accreditation and has signed the AoC Mental 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.

## **Related Documents**

1. Student Handbook
2. Grievance Policy – Staff Handbook
3. FE Student Academic Behaviour Management Policy
4. Student Non-Academic Behaviour Management Policy.
5. Complaints Form

## **Appendix A – What support is available to students when bringing a complaint?**

1. Any Student using this Procedure is entitled to seek advice and support on raising a complaint from the Students' Union (SU) and Hartpury strongly encourages all Students to access this service before initiating this Policy.
2. The SU Officers have knowledge and experience of Hartpury's procedures who can offer confidential and independent advice on the process, support Students in the preparation of their complaint and attend meetings under this Procedure as a Representative.
3. During all stages of this Policy, a student may be accompanied to meetings by a companion. A companion can be:
  - fellow student
  - Students' Union representative; or
  - member of staff at Hartpury
4. A companion may not be a fellow student who has had prior involvement in the case or who is likely to be or has been interviewed as part of the complaint.
5. Please note that only in exceptional circumstances and by prior agreement may a student be accompanied by someone who is external to Hartpury. For Hartpury College students aged under 18 they can be accompanied by their Parent or Next of Kin.
6. A student's companion will not be permitted to answer questions on behalf of the student.
7. Where a student has protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 Hartpury can make appropriate adjustments in order to prevent the student being treated less favourably. This may include holding meetings by MS Teams, video conferencing, telephone conferencing, or other appropriate means. Any Student who may require assistance in making their complaint should discuss their needs with Hartpury and it will then seek to refer the student to appropriate support.
8. Hartpury acknowledges that its procedures can cause additional worry and stress to Students. Students are encouraged to seek support from any of the Hartpury's support services, particularly the Wellbeing Team who can provide immediate support and further signposting for any personal difficulties Students may be facing and who also have a drop-in service where Students can go when feeling distressed and needing direction or guidance. There are also several other online support functions, leaflets and workbooks designed for Students which they are encouraged to view.
9. Any requests for support will be treated sensitively and confidentially by the Hartpury.

### **Schedule**

- a. Transport Provider – Zeelo - Complaints Team [contact@zeelo.co](mailto:contact@zeelo.co)
- b. Catering Provider – Aramark – Liam Armstrong (Account Director) [armstrong-liam@aramark.co.uk](mailto:armstrong-liam@aramark.co.uk)

## Policy Flow Chart

