

Complaints Procedure

Student and Academic Services

1. Contents

2.	Contents.....	2
3.	Introduction	4
4.	Our aims.....	4
5.	Definitions.....	4
1.	Is the complaint procedure right for you?.....	5
	1.1 Student Reps	5
	1.2 Academic Appeals	5
	1.3 Student Conduct Policy	5
	1.4 Staff Grievance.....	5
	1.5 For UWE Bristol students undertaking apprenticeships.....	5
2.	Our Commitment to You.....	5
3.	Who can complain?	6
4.	If you study at a partner institution.....	6
5.	If you are on a work placement	6
6.	Types of complaint.....	6
7.	Allegations of criminal behaviour will be referred directly to the Vice-Chancellor’s office.	7
8.	Anonymous complaints	7
9.	Complaints against a member of staff.....	7
10.	Group complaints.....	8
11.	Vexatious and malicious complaints.....	8
12.	Meeting to discuss a complaint	8
13.	Your complaint.....	9
14.	Our complaint procedure	9
15.	Timeframes	16
16.	Outcomes.....	16
17.	Referral to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).....	16
18.	Contact details	16
	18.1 Apprenticeship students.....	16
	18.2 Complaints, via the student casework team	17
	18.3 Human Resources	17

18.4 Information Points	17
18.5 Office of the independent Adjudicator.....	17
18.6 Students Union Advice Centre	17
18.7 Students Union Representation.....	17
19. Ownership and Oversight	18
20. Version history	18
6. Appendix A – Related Policies.....	19

2. Introduction

The University welcomes all feedback and considers complaints to be a valuable source of information enabling us to improve services and enhance your experience as a student. A 'complaint' is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response.

3. Our aims

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint.
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint.
- To make sure everyone at UWE (University of the West of England), Bristol knows what to do if a complaint is received.
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

4. Definitions

We/Us/Our/the University/UWE Bristol means the University of the West of England, Bristol.

You/Your means you, a registered students of the University.

Programme means your course or programme of study.

Partner/Partner Institution means and institution or organisation with which the university has an agreement to deliver courses approved by the university and which lead to university awards.

Terms and conditions means the contractual agreement in place as part of the registration process.

1. Is the complaint procedure right for you?

Whilst the complaint procedure can be used to address concerns relating to a wide variety of University matters, there may be other options available that are either better suited to your issue or that you consider preferable to raising an official complaint. If you are unsure of the best course of action, please contact the Student Casework Team [Section 18]. Alternatively, you can speak to the SU (Students Union) advice centre [Section 18]. Other routes you can use include.

1.1 Student 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 and an online feedback form can be found on the Student Representative webpage [Section 18]. If you would like to submit feedback relating to broad issues of University policy or procedure, please contact your Students' Union Representative [Section 18].

1.2 Academic Appeals

The Academic Appeal [See Appendix 1 for link] procedure enables you to request, within specified limited grounds, the outcome of an Examining Board to be reconsidered.

1.3 Student Conduct Policy

Complaints about student behaviour, such as harassment by a student, should be addressed via the Student Conduct Policy, [See Appendix 1 for link].

1.4 Staff Grievance

The Grievance Procedure is designed to deal with grievances arising directly out of an employee's employment or working practices of the University. Further information can be found on the Human Resources webpage [Section 18].

1.5 For UWE Bristol students undertaking apprenticeships

If you are a student on a degree apprenticeship course you can make a complaint directly to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Apprenticeships Service Support team, this is in addition to your right to make a complaint directly to the university, the ESFA Apprenticeships Service Support contact details can be found in [Section 18].

2. Our Commitment to You

Throughout the complaint process we will:

- Take all complaints seriously.
- Treat you with respect at all times.
- Not treat you differently because you have made a complaint.

- Be open and accessible.
- Be accountable and apologise if we are wrong.
- Be fair to all parties involved.
- Encourage local resolution in as many cases as possible.

3. Who can complain?

The complaint procedure can be used by the following:

- An individual student (full or part time, any programme of study).
- A group of students (in which case the group must nominate one person to be the spokesperson for the group, representing the group in all matters relating to the complaint).
- Prospective students.
- Visitors to the University.
- Contractors working in the University.
- Employers and placement providers.
- Members of the public.
- Alumni.
- Staff – for example where the complaint relates to a service (e.g., car parking), but not personal grievances (which are covered by the grievance procedure).
- Other organisations with which the University works.
- Third parties.

If you wish to make a complaint it is strongly encouraged that you do so personally. A complaint received from a third party (including a parent) will be considered only with the express written permission of the person to whom the complaint relates.

4. If you study at a partner institution

If you are a student in partner institutions, we expect you to use the complaint procedure of your local institution in the first instance. You are, however, also free to pursue a complaint through Stage Three of this complaint procedure if the complaint remains unresolved through the local procedure and refers to an aspect over which UWE has authority and the power to deliver a remedy.

5. If you are on a work placement

If you are a student on placement, you should use the complaint procedure of your placement provider if you have a complaint relating to aspects of your placement itself. You are however also free to pursue a complaint through the UWE complaint procedure if the complaint refers to an aspect over which UWE has authority and the power to deliver a remedy.

6. Types of complaint

A complaint may relate to programmes of study, facilities or services provided by the University, actions, or lack of action by university staff and will include but is not limited to:

- Teaching and facilities

- Student accommodation
- Research supervision
- Welfare
- Maladministration
- Procedural irregularities
- Unfair practices
- Criminal behaviour and legal proceedings

7. Criminal behaviour and legal proceedings

Allegations of criminal behaviour will be referred directly to the Vice-Chancellor's office.

If you bring court or tribunal proceedings against the University which may be relevant to the complaint, the University will normally suspend consideration of the complaint under this procedure until the outcome of legal proceedings is known.

8. 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 arising to help inform broader university responses and improve services.

9. Complaints against a member of staff

It is recognised that a small minority of complaints may be made about actions or behaviour by a member of UWE staff. A student considering making such a complaint is advised to discuss the concern with the Students' Union Advice Centre [Section 18] in the first instance.

If a complaint refers to a specific member of staff, the complaint will be brought to the attention of that individual (generally by the relevant Senior Manager) as part of the investigation of the complaint.

The staff member will be kept informed at all stages and will have the right to make representations to the Caseworker and/or Student Casework Team Manager if they are unhappy with the investigation or 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 Human Resources Department [Section 18], particularly where the complaint is relevant to another University policy, for example:

- Staff Ill Health.
- Staff Conduct.
- Staff Performance.
- Dignity at Work Policy.
- Equal Opportunities Policy.
- Harassment policy.

- Advice and support.

Informal advice can be obtained from Student Support Advisers, but also Reception/Information Points, Personal Tutors, Module Leaders, Course Leaders, Scheme Directors, Head of Department, Central Service staff and the Students' Union (Student Representatives and Students' Union Advice Centre). Members of the Student Casework Team can also give informal advice about the Complaint Procedure. Students may particularly find it helpful to approach the Students Union Advice Centre [Section 18] in the first instance, as this centre has considerable experience of advising and supporting students wishing to make a complaint.

10. Group complaints

A group of students may use the procedure outlined in this document to make a collective complaint provided that one student is identified as the lead complainant and contact for purposes of communication. However, this does not mean that all students within the group of complaints will receive the same outcome because of the complaint.

11. Vexatious and malicious complaints

The university understands that if you make a complaint then it is of concern to you no matter what others might think. However, the university reserves the right to consider a complaint vexatious if.

- The 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 meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- The complaints are designed to cause disruption or annoyance

Deciding whether a complaint is vexatious is a balancing exercise for the University and we will take into account all the circumstances of the case. We will consider both the contents of your complaint(s) and your behaviour in relation to the complaint before reaching a decision. Any final decision will usually be taken in consultation with the Student Casework Team.

- 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.

Frivolous, malicious, or unreasonably persistent complaints will not be accepted. The University reserves the right to take appropriate disciplinary and/or legal action against anyone considered to have made such a complaint.

12. Meeting to discuss a complaint

In some circumstances, where the facts of the case warrant it, the caseworker handling your complaint may arrange a meeting with you and other relevant University staff, to establish the precise cause of dissatisfaction or explore the remedy being sought.

In any meeting you will have the right to be accompanied by a friend, relative or officer of the Students' Union, who also has the right to speak on your behalf. A member of staff who has been the subject of a complaint will also have the right to be accompanied in any meeting.

13. Your complaint

When you submit a complaint, it is important to include all relevant points in chronological order, you should aim to be as clear and concise as possible as this will help us respond to your complaint more quickly.

Be clear and realistic about the outcome you are seeking. It will be more difficult to address your complaint if your goal is unclear, or if you are asking for something that is not possible.

Details of a complaint may need to be shared with relevant colleagues for a full investigation to take place, and individuals named in a complaint will be made aware of the allegations and can give their version of events.

14. Our complaint procedure

The complaints procedure has been designed to be flexible and there may be some instances where the Student Casework Team determine that it is appropriate to bypass one of the three stages. For example, a complaint may go straight from Stage One to Stage Three, or be considered immediately under Stage Two where early resolution is not possible or suitable due to the character, complexity or seriousness of the case.

Table 1 Stages of the complaint procedure

Informal Complaint (Stage One)	Formal Complaint (Stage Two)	Complaint Review (Stage Three)
<p>This stage involves raising awareness of the problem, with the relevant staff in the faculty or service.</p> <p>The University expects that most issues can be resolved informally through normal contacts and discussion between staff, students, and other interested parties without the need to instigate formal procedures.</p>	<p>This stage involves raising a formal complaint with the Student Casework Team.</p> <p>This should normally only take place once an individual has attempted to resolve matters informally under Stage One and has received a written response.</p>	<p>This stage involves a review and final consideration of the case by another person, usually the Student Casework Team Manager, or another senior manager.</p> <p>The grounds upon which a review can take place include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the procedures followed at the formal stage • A consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable • New material evidence which the complainant was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process
<p>Who should I contact?</p> <p>You should raise the issue with someone close to the origin (lecturer, module leader, award leader, personal tutor, relevant administrator, person responsible for a particular service, Student Representative etc).</p> <p>If you need advice or guidance on whom to contact in a faculty or service to make your complaint you should contact the information point. The information Point will not be able to resolve your complaint but will be able to direct you [Section 18].</p>	<p>Who should I contact?</p> <p>At Stage Two, cases are investigated and considered by a Caseworker within the Student Casework Team. A student submitting a complaint may wish to obtain advice and guidance from the Students' Union Advice Centre [Section 18] prior to completing the Stage Two form.</p> <p>The complaint must normally be made in writing, using the form provided for this purpose through the UWE website or from the University, and addressed to the Student Casework Team [Section 18]</p>	<p>Who should I contact?</p> <p>A Stage Three complaint review should be submitted to the Student casework team If the complainant is a student, Students may also wish to consult the Students' Union Advice Centre [Section 18] for support and guidance prior to submitting the complaint.</p> <p>The complaint must normally be made in writing, using the form provided for this purpose through the UWE website, by email or in writing addressed to the Student Casework Team. [Section 18]</p>

Informal Complaint (Stage One)	Formal Complaint (Stage Two)	Complaint Review (Stage Three)
<p>Making a stage one complaint You can raise your complaint either by email or verbally, and discussing it with the relevant team or individual</p>	<p>Making a stage two complaint To submit a Stage Two complaint, please complete the Stage Two form and return it to the Student Casework Team as detailed above.</p> <p>If you cannot complete the form, you should contact the Student Casework Team to discuss alternative methods.</p>	<p>Making a Stage Three submission To submit a Stage Three review, please complete the Stage Three form and return it to the Student Casework Team as detailed above.</p> <p>Where this is not possible, the complainant should contact the Student Casework Team to discuss alternative methods.</p>
<p>What should I include in my complaint? You should indicate the outcome being sought.</p> <p>A student complainant may wish to consult the Students Union Advice Centre [Section 18] for advice.</p>	<p>What should I include in my complaint? Complaints submitted by letter or email (i.e., not on the Stage Two form) will be accepted provided they include:</p> <p>Complainant’s name, address, student number, telephone number, email address and programme (as appropriate) The nature of the complaint (in the complainant’s own words) The Stage One steps already taken Details of the response received A statement about why the complainant remains dissatisfied The outcome being sought</p>	<p>What should I include in my complaint? Complaints submitted by letter or email (i.e., not on the Stage Three form) will be accepted provided they include:</p> <p>Complainant’s name, address, student number (if appropriate), telephone number, email address and programme The nature of the complaint and outcome of the earlier investigation The reasons for requesting further consideration of the complaint, i.e., supply of new evidence, or explanation of alleged material irregularity in the investigation of the complaint The outcome being sought</p>

<p>Timescales</p> <p>A complaint should be raised as soon as possible after the actions/lack of actions which prompted it; the greater the time delay from an action/lack of action to submission of the complaint, the more difficult it will be for the complaint to be thoroughly investigated.</p> <p>Complaints will not normally be accepted if submitted more than 28 calendar days after the issue arose unless there was good reason the issue could not have been raised sooner.</p> <p>You will receive an acknowledgment of receipt within three working days or as soon as is practically possible (recognising that if a complaint is addressed to an individual, that person will not always be immediately available).</p> <p>We would normally expect a full and final response to be given within 14 calendar days.</p> <p>If an immediate solution cannot be found and further investigation is required, the person receiving the complaint will acknowledge this within 14 Calendar days of receipt giving an indication of the timescale for a full response to be given.</p> <p>In these cases, we would expect a full and final response to be given within no more than 28 Calendar days.</p>	<p>Timescales</p> <p>A Stage Two complaint should be submitted as soon as possible after receiving a response to the Stage One complaint; the greater the time delay, the more difficult it will be for the complaint to be thoroughly investigated.</p> <p>A Stage Two complaint will not normally be accepted if submitted more than 28 calendar days after you were notified of the outcome at Stage One, unless there was good reason a Stage Two complaint could not have been submitted sooner.</p> <p>You will receive an acknowledgment of receipt within three working days giving an indication of the timescale for a full response to be given.</p> <p>The caseworker will aim to respond in full within 42 calendar days of the complaint being received, providing there are no undue delays, for example in obtaining further evidence from you.</p> <p>On rare occasions where this is not possible, for example because a complaint is particularly complex, we will contact you to provide an update and an estimated timeframe.</p> <p>In these cases, we would expect a full and final response to be given within no more than 84 calendar days.</p>	<p>Timescales</p> <p>A Stage Three review should be submitted as soon as possible after receiving a response to the Stage Two complaint; the greater the time delay, the more difficult it will be for the complaint to be reviewed.</p> <p>A Stage Three review will not normally be considered if it is submitted more than 28 calendar after you were notified of the outcome at Stage Two, unless there was good it could not have been submitted sooner</p> <p>You will receive an acknowledgment of receipt within three working days.</p> <p>You will be notified within 14 calendar days of receipt if your application meets the criteria for review.</p> <p>A response will normally be sent within 42 calendar days of you receiving notification that your application meets the criteria for review.</p> <p>You will be notified in writing if consideration of your review will take longer on rare occasions where it is not possible to respond within this time limit, we will contact you to provide an update and an estimated timeframe.</p> <p>In these cases, we would expect a full and final response to be given within no more than 84 calendar days.</p>
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Informal Complaint (Stage One)	Formal Complaint (Stage Two)	Complaint Review (Stage Three)
<p>The Stage One process This will vary depending on who you contact and the nature of your complaint.</p>	<p>The Stage Two process Once the complaint has been received,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the caseworker will inform the relevant faculty or service and will provide a brief outline of the concerns raised. • If necessary, the Caseworker may telephone you to discuss your complaint and/or seek more details. • The Caseworker will then investigate the complaint, speaking to concerned parties and requesting written statements as appropriate. 	<p>The Stage Three process The stage 3 review is not a formal reconsideration of the case, and the reviewer will conduct an impartial review of the complaint handling and outcome. This will not necessarily mean carrying out a further investigation of the matters raised.</p> <p>Any new evidence supplied will be considered only if there is a clear case to do so i.e., it was reasonably not supplied at the time of the original complaint.</p> <p>The reviewer may seek further information from the you and/or those members of staff involved in the earlier investigation of the complaint. They may also consult a senior colleague responsible for the area under investigation.</p>

Informal Complaint (Stage One)	Formal Complaint (Stage Two)	Complaint Review (Stage Three)
<p>Outcomes The outcomes at stage one will vary depending on the nature of your complaint and the findings of any local investigation.</p> <p>Where a complaint is found to be justified or partly justified, the outcome will depend heavily upon the accepted grounds of the complaint.</p> <p>Where the University is found to have made a mistake or fallen short of reasonable expectations, an apology will be given, the mistake rectified where appropriate, and actions taken to prevent the same mistake happening again</p>	<p>Outcomes Upon concluding the investigation into your complaint, the caseworker may decide that your complaint is either; not justified, partly justified, or justified.</p> <p>Where a complaint is found to be justified or partly justified, the outcome will depend heavily upon the accepted grounds of complaint.</p> <p>Where the University is found to have made a mistake or fallen short of reasonable expectations, an apology will be given, the mistake rectified where appropriate, and actions taken to prevent the same mistake happening again</p>	<p>Outcomes The reviewer may decide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the investigation was properly carried out and the response given was appropriate and consistent with other responses, and no further action is required. 2. That there were shortcomings in the investigation carried out and/or the response given and/or that new evidence had been provided which warranted further investigation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In such cases the reviewer may decide regarding resolution of the complaint. • May refer the complaint back to the Caseworker for further action.

Informal Complaint (Stage One)	Formal Complaint (Stage Two)	Complaint Review (Stage Three)
<p>What should I expect from a Stage One response?</p> <p>If you make a complaint in writing we will respond to you by email or, exceptionally, by telephone to discuss the issues raised.</p> <p>In instances where a complaint covers more than one area of the University (e.g., because its location is not clear or because it covers more than one faculty or service), the person first receiving your complaint will be responsible for leading any investigation, they will liaise with any third parties as necessary ensuring a response is agreed.</p> <p>The response will normally be in made in writing, even if your original complaint was raised verbally.</p> <p>The response will include information on the steps to be taken if you remain dissatisfied.</p>	<p>What should I expect from a Stage Two response?</p> <p>A response will be sent to the complainant in writing, it will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indicate the outcome, • reasons for the outcome, and • how the complainant can, if desired, take the complaint further through Stage Three of the Complaint Procedure. <p>If you want to submit a Stage Three complaint you should do so as soon as possible after you receive your stage two outcome letter and within 28 calendar days of the date of that letter.</p>	<p>What should I expect from a Stage Three response?</p> <p>The reviewer will ensure that a response is sent to you in writing, copied to all other relevant parties.</p> <p>Depending on the nature of the complaint, the reviewer may respond directly or ensure that a response is sent directly by an appropriate colleague.</p> <p>The response will indicate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcome and the reasons for the outcome • confirmation that internal procedures are complete. • it will outline the right of the complainant to pursue the complaint further through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator [Section 18] (In the case of complaints from current and former students) • The reviewer will provide the complainant with a 'Completion of Procedures

15. Timeframes

All time limits for actions that you can take and for our responses are expressed as calendar days (this includes Saturdays, Sundays, days when the University is closed and bank holidays). In exceptional cases a complex complaint may take longer to consider.

Complaints may be considered after these timeframes where grounds are shown to reasonably prove the complaint could not have been made sooner.

16. Outcomes

There will be some instances in which it would be counter-productive to instigate a long-drawn-out investigation, and instead we will work to find a way forward which is acceptable to all concerned. This may include instances where the university considers mediation as a suitable alternative remedy.

It is important to note that a complaint may not be accepted if the remedy sought is beyond the power of the University to deliver.

17. Referral to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) [Section 18] provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. A complaint by a current or former student may be taken to the OIA once the University's internal complaints procedures have been exhausted and a 'Completion of Procedures' letter has been issued.

After a complaint has been referred to the OIA, the OIA will write to the University asking for additional information. The Student Casework Team will respond to such enquiries, in accordance with OIA timeframes.

The OIA will investigate the complaint, and if the complaint is found to be justified may make recommendations to the University, which are actioned appropriately and included in an annual report.

Complainants who are not current or former students are not able to pursue a complaint through the OIA. Any complainant has the right to pursue legal action against the University. The Student Casework Team Manager will coordinate the University's response to such action. Further information regarding the OIA can be found on the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education website [Section 18].

18. Contact details

18.1 Apprenticeship students

- General Information: <https://help.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/hc/en-gb>

- Email: helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk
- Phone: 08000 150 600

18.2 Complaints, via the student casework team

- Email: complaints@uwe.ac.uk
- Phone: 0117 32 83371 or at
- Forms can be sent via email to: complaints@uwe.ac.uk or posted to the address below.

Student Casework Team
 Student and Academic Services
 UWE Frenchay Campus
 Coldharbour Lane
 Bristol BS16 1QY

18.3 Human Resources

- General Information: <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/structure-and-governance/policies/hr-policies-and-procedures>

18.4 Information Points

- General Information: <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/campus-and-facilities/information-points>
- Email: infopoint@uwe.ac.uk .
- Phone +44 (0)117 32 85678. We are currently open 08:30-17:00 Monday to Thursday and 08:30-16:30 on Fridays.

18.5 Office of the independent Adjudicator

- General Information: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>
- Contact details: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/contact-us/>

18.6 Students Union Advice Centre

- General Information: <https://www.thestudentsunion.co.uk/advice-centre/>
- Email: advice@uwe.ac.uk
- Phone: 0117 3282676
- Frenchay: The Students' Union, Union1, U Block
- Glenside: Student Centre (term time only)
- Bower Ashton: Student Advice Hub (term time only)

18.7 Students Union Representation

General Information: <https://www.thestudentsunion.co.uk/representation/>

19. Ownership and Oversight

Document name:	Complaints Procedure
Version number:	V22.06.08
Equality Analysis:	[Date submitted and outcome]
First approved by:	Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee
This version approved by:	Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee/8 June 2022
Effective from:	01 September 2022
Next review date:	June 2025
Senior Policy Owner:	Head of Student and Academic Policy Enhancement
Policy Author:	Student Casework Team Manager
Overseeing committee:	Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee
Compliance measures:	Annual monitoring through the institutional quality report
Related policies, procedures, and codes of practice:	
Related legislative and/or regulatory requirements	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

20. Version history

Version	Date	Summary of changes	Author
V22.05.24	24/05/22	New policy	Head of Student and Academic Policy Enhancement
V22.06.08	08/06/22	Dates changes from working to calendar days	Head of Student and Academic Policy Enhancement

5. Appendix A – Related Policies

Academic Appeals - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/study/academic-information/academic-appeals>

Conduct - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/health-and-wellbeing/staying-safe-on-and-off-campus/student-conduct-and-reporting-incidents>

Fee Waiver and Refund Policy - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/money-and-finance/funds-during-study/waiver-policy>

Fitness to Study - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/structure-and-governance/policies/fitness-to-study-policy-principles>

Policies - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/structure-and-governance/policies>

Refund Policy (international Students) - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/courses/fees/paying-your-fees/international-student-payment/refund-policy-for-international-deposits#section-1>

Report and Support - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/health-and-wellbeing/staying-safe-on-and-off-campus/report-and-support>

Terms and Conditions - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/structure-and-governance/policies>

Tuition Fee Policy - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/courses/fees/tuition-fees-policy>