



Procedure for Handling Student Complaints

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1. Purpose

This procedure supports the *AQAE035 Student Complaints Policy* which articulates the principles, standards and requirements underpinning the handling of complaints by students in Atlantic Technology University (ATU / the University). The purpose of this document is to describe the process to undertake if one or more students wish to make a complaint and to provide a pathway to the resolution of the complaint.

2. Scope

This policy applies to

- all registered students at ATU
- a person who was a registered student at ATU, subject to submitting the complaint within three months of ceasing to be a registered student at ATU (graduated or withdrawal). The complaint must relate to an incident that occurred while the person was a registered student at ATU.

Complaints must be raised not later than three months following the incident that prompted the complaint. This limitation may only be waived in exceptional circumstances.

3. Reference Documents

- *General Data Protection Regulation EU 2016/679 (GDPR)*
- *Data Protection Act 2018*
- *Freedom of Information Act 2014*

4. Key Definitions

Complaint: the expression of significant or sustained dissatisfaction by one or more students with the quality of ATU's services or facilities.¹

Complainant: the person making the complaint.

Function/Unit encompasses the area of the University in respect of which a complaint may be raised: Departments, Schools, Faculties, Facilities, Professional and Support Services.

Informal resolution: The aim is to address concerns at an early stage and as close as possible to the point of origin through discussion, clarification, and/or mediation.

Respondent: the person / function / unit that is the subject of the complaint.

¹ Adapted from UCD Student Complaints Policy

5. The Complaints Process

ATU endorses the principle that most issues can be resolved quickly by speaking with the relevant staff member, or relevant Head of Department / Central Services Manager (CSM) with the aim to address concerns at an early stage and as close as possible to the point of origin through discussion, clarification, and/or mediation. This is called *informal resolution*.

If a student has a general query, is considering making a complaint and/or if they are unsure about whether an issue or concern constitutes a complaint, they are encouraged to discuss the issue with one of the following:

- Head of Department
- ATU Students Union
- Student Support Service
- Online Support Advisor (for online students)
- the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals.

5.1.1 Support person

Complainants, respondents and other relevant parties involved in managing a complaint may be accompanied by a support person during any meeting that takes place under this procedure. Meetings can be in-person or online. Should a complainant or respondent wish to be accompanied by a support person to any meeting, they need to inform the University at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting and provide a name and email address of the support person attending.

Legal representation is not permitted under this procedure. Students who are under 18 years of age or a vulnerable adult, must be accompanied by a parent/legal guardian or a person over 18 years of age nominated by a parent or legal guardian.

The role of the support person is to provide emotional and administrative support. They may offer reassurance and take notes during any meeting. The support person does not actively participate in the meeting and cannot speak or advocate on behalf of the complainant or respondent. In exceptional circumstances *and* with the agreement of all parties, the support person may be requested to play a more active role.

The support person must conduct themselves with professionalism and respect and refrain from interrupting or engaging in any behaviour that could be seen as disruptive. The support person must maintain the confidentiality of all information shared during the meeting.

5.1.2 Communication with Students

Once a student is registered with the University all communications to them throughout their studies, and up to the conferring or receipt of awards, will normally be via their ATU email address. Students must check this regularly for official communications. A personal

email address/telephone number will only be used where a student does not have access to an ATU email yet or their access to the ATU email has expired.

6. Procedure

The student complaint process is structured into three distinct stages (see *Appendix 1: Student Complaints Flowchart* for a visual representation of the process).²

Full details of a complaint will be put to the named respondent, and the respondent will be given an opportunity to address/respond to the complaint. Respondents will be advised of available University supports and advice.

ATU will endeavour to conclude resolution of a complaint (informal and / or formal) that falls within the scope of this procedure within 30 working days of receipt of a complaint. All relevant parties will be provided with updates where there is a potential delay in processing the complaint, outlining the reasons for any such delay.

6.1.1 Stage 1: Informal Process

Stage 1 is designed to support informal and early resolution. Students are advised to raise concerns directly with the staff member or the Function / Unit in which the issue has occurred as soon as possible after becoming aware of the issue. It is expected that most issues can be resolved at this stage. Participation by complainants and respondents in the Stage 1 process is voluntary.

The Stage 1 process is divided into two sub-stages as follows:

Stage 1 A: Complaint raised directly with Respondent

The student (complainant) contacts the relevant person (respondent) outlining the nature of the complaint. The complainant should be very clear in describing what they think is the issue and stick to relevant facts and provide examples of the issue.

The process is as follows:

- i. If the complaint concerns University policy or practice, the student should seek to identify the person with local responsibility for its implementation, operation or practice. The Faculty Administration office or the Student's Union can provide the appropriate contact details.
- ii. If the complaint concerns an ATU staff member, the student should approach the staff member to arrange an appointment to discuss the issue and at the meeting, a mutually agreed memo outlining the complaint and any proposed resolution must be made.

² Terms of Reference will be available for Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the Complaints Process

If a complainant feels unable to approach the respondent directly, **or** if the respondent does not wish to meet with the complainant **or** if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the issue raised, they can request a meeting with the relevant Head of Department or CSM (or the Head of School /Function/Unit in the event of a conflict of interest) to discuss the complaint (Stage 1 B).

Stage 1 B: Complaint raised with Head of Department / CSM

The Head of Department / CSM or equivalent will seek to resolve the matter locally and informally. Meetings should be arranged as soon as possible after a complaint is raised. The Head of Department / CSM will:

- i. Review and agree the substance of the complaint with the complainant including any documentation submitted. The issue may be resolved at this stage.
- ii. Facilitate meetings with all parties, if required, for discussion, mediation and seeking resolution.
- iii. Support an agreed resolution /outcome of which a written record will be made. Communication of the agreed resolution will be forwarded to the complainant and the respondent.

Normally, only when Stage 1 has concluded should Stage 2 be invoked. The complaint can be escalated to Stage 2 if:

- i. a resolution cannot be agreed
- ii. the agreed resolution reached at this *informal stage* is not subsequently adhered to within an agreed / reasonable timeframe where appropriate.
- iii. the cause of the complaint recurs
- iv. Stage 1 is not appropriate for addressing the complaint.

6.1.2 Stage 2: Formal Process

The formal process is initiated when a complainant submits a written complaint to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals using the *AQAE055_001 Student Complaint Form*.

A Stage 2 complaint may be withdrawn at any stage. This must be made in writing to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals.

Guidelines for Submission

The complainant prepares the *AQAE055_001 Student Complaint Form* and submits it via email to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals: studentcomplaintsandconduct@atu.ie. The form should contain full details of the complaint including times and dates, any witnesses, or any corroborating evidence. Additional supporting documentation may be attached as relevant and additional pages may be included.

The University recommends that students do not use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate text around complaints.

Review and Referral of Valid Complaint

The *AQAE055_001 Student Complaint Form* will initially be reviewed by the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals who will liaise with the relevant Head of School / Head of Function/Unit to ensure the complaint is valid, is complete and falls within the scope of allowable complaints under the *AQAE035 Student Complaints Policy* (see section 2.1 of the policy for exclusions from this policy). If the complaint is found to be incomplete or outside the permissible scope of this procedure, the complainant will be notified by Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals and may be asked to provide additional information or directed to an appropriate alternative resolution process.

A valid and complete *AQAE055_001 Student Complaint Form* will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt.

A Stage 2 formal complaint will be investigated by the relevant Head of School / Head of Function/Unit (or their nominee) *and* a nominee of the Vice President for Students, Teaching and Learning, drawn from an approved panel of staff (who will have had no prior involvement with the complaint or otherwise have a conflict of interest). This commences the formal inquiry and process aimed at resolving the complaint.

Inquiry and Resolution Process

The primary role of the formal investigation is to conduct the inquiry to establish the facts of the complaint as far as practicable. This includes notifying the respondent of the complaint, providing them with an opportunity to respond in writing, and facilitating meetings with all parties to discuss the complaint. The Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals will coordinate all communication during the investigation process.

The process is outlined as follows:

- i. A preliminary review of the complaint and the available evidence is undertaken and a copy of the *AQAE055_001 Student Complaint Form* is furnished without delay to the respondent to seek their response to the complaint raised. Normally, this response will be provided in writing within 10 working days of the formal complaint being received by the respondent.
- ii. The Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals arrange meeting(s) with all parties either separately or jointly with a view to resolving the issue(s). Any witnesses considered to be relevant may also be interviewed. Witnesses cannot be compelled to attend under this procedure. All meeting(s) will be recorded on *AQAE055_002 Student Complaints Meeting Record Form*.
- iii. If agreed, mediation (a voluntary process) will be provided to facilitate resolution.

All the available evidence will be reviewed and considered including an assessment of the known facts. The outcome of Stage 2 will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (using the *AQAE055_003 Student Complaint Investigation Report Form*) who will inform all parties. Appendix 2 provides a list of indicative outcomes of Stage 2.

Following the issuing of the written decision, both the complainant and the respondent has the right to appeal.

6.1.3 Stage 3: Appeal Process

Grounds for Appeal

Appeals must be made in good faith and in the spirit of the principles of the *AQAE035 Student Complaints Policy* and comply with the grounds for appeal. An appeal must satisfy one of the grounds of appeal as follows:

- i. new information is presented, which was not, for good reason, available during the initial investigation.
- ii. evidence of procedural irregularity, which has impacted the outcome.
- iii. the investigation did not address the substantive components of the complaint.

Making an Appeal

An appeal must be lodged within 5 working days of receiving the outcome of Stage 2. The process is as follows:

- i. A written request is made to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals outlining the ground (s) for the appeal including the reasons for the appeal.
- i. The appeal is forwarded to the Vice President Students, Teaching and Learning and will include a written summary of the process to date along with the relevant forms: *AQAE055_001 Student Complaint Form and the AQAE055_003 Student Complaints Investigation Report Form*.
- ii. The Vice President for Students, Teaching and Learning will convene a *Student Complaints Appeal Committee* and ensure that all members of the committee have had no prior involvement in the complaint. The Committee comprises the following:
 - a. one Head of School / Head of Function / Unit (Chair)
 - b. one Head of Department
 - c. one CSM
 - d. one officer from ATU Students Union who has had no prior involvement in the complaint
- ii. The role of the *Student Complaints Appeals Committee* is to assess whether the investigation has correctly, fairly and properly addressed the substantive areas of the complaint, followed correct procedures and examined all the evidence.
- iii. Other evidence may be gathered as deemed necessary including interviewing all parties involved.

The *Student Complaints Appeals Committee* shall endeavour to complete its review within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal application (see Appendix 3 for indicative outcomes of Stage 3) and forward its final report using the *AQAE055_004 Student Complaint Appeals Form* to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals who will notify all parties of the outcome.

The decision of the *Student Complaints Appeal Committee* is final and cannot be appealed to any higher authority by any further process in the University.

This outcome does not interfere with the Statutory Rights of any parties to the application.

6.2 Rights to Review by the Ombudsman

The Ombudsman provides an impartial, independent, and free dispute resolution service. The Ombudsman can examine complaints from students about various issues. These could include for example general decisions students perceive to be unfair or the perception that incorrect information has been provided. Anyone who is dissatisfied with the outcome of the procedures or processes of the University has the right to recourse to the Ombudsman and/or the Ombudsman for Children.

The Ombudsman does not consider matters of academic judgment. The Ombudsman will ask the student for details of the student complaint and a copy of the ATU appeal response.

The Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children Office function to protect the rights of individuals or groups by independently and impartially investigating complaints made about public bodies. Specifically, the Ombudsman for Children will investigate complaints made by or on behalf of children in relation to the administrative actions of public bodies like Atlantic Technological University.

Contact the Ombudsman by:

- i. Clicking on the 'Make A Complaint' link at www.ombudsman.ie
- ii. Or writing to Office of the Ombudsman, 6 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 W773
- iii. Or calling the Ombudsman on 00353 (0)1 639 5600 if the student has any queries or if the student needs help making the student complaint.

7. Record Retention and Record Sharing

All records associated with this procedure must be stored securely in accordance with *ATU Data Protection Policy* and *ATU Record Retention Schedule*.

8. Documents Related to this Procedure

8.1 Policy

- *AQAE035 Student Complaints Policy*

8.2 Forms

- *AQAE055_001 Student Complaint Form*
- *AQAE055_002 Student Complaints Meeting Record Form*
- *AQAE055_003 Student Complaints Investigation Report Form*
- *AQAE055_004 Student Complaint Appeals Form*

9. Measurement of Effectiveness of this Procedure

The Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals prepare an annual anonymised summary of **all** complaints handled during the academic year under this procedure. The anonymised summary reports will be forwarded to the Vice President for Students, Teaching and Learning who will collate the information (along with similar information related to any appeals) and present it to the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body.

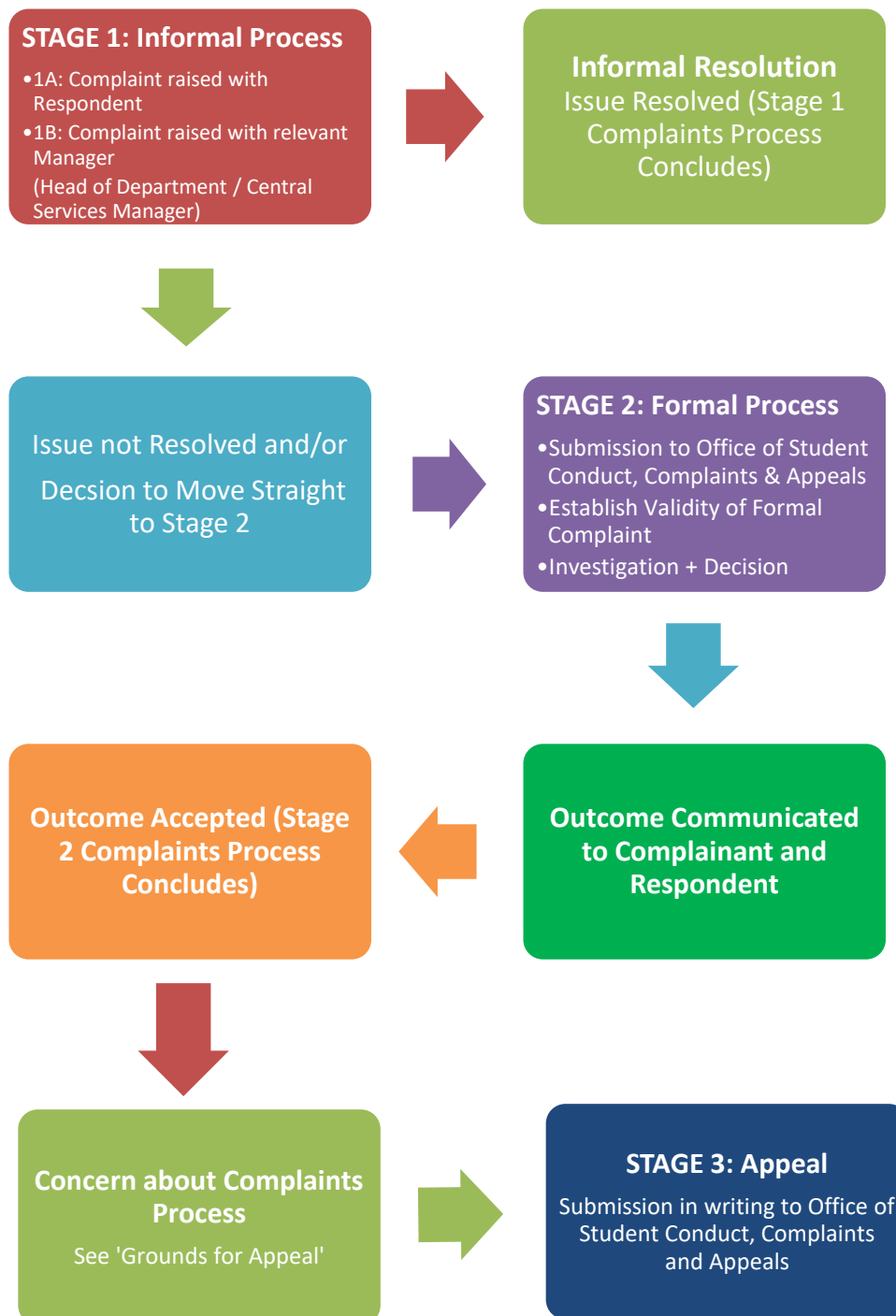
All complaints and outcomes are monitored by the Office of the Vice President for Students, Teaching and Learning to ensure relevant quality issues are identified and addressed.

10. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New Procedure	23 March 2026 Academic Standards and Policy Committee
001		

Appendices

Appendix 1: Student Complaints Flowchart



Appendix 2: Indicative Outcomes of Stage 2

Indicative outcomes of Stage 2 may include one or more of the following:

- i. resolution to the satisfaction of all parties
- ii. recommendation that ATU take certain specified steps to resolve the problem
- iii. provision of appropriate training and supports to the respondent
- iv. direct that the respondent amend their behaviour or practices as appropriate
- v. direct that the respondent apologise to the complainant
- vi. rule that the complaint or problem was without merit
- vii. rule that the complaint is vexatious and directing that the *AQAE006 Student Code* be invoked
- viii. recommendation that the matter should be progressed through other ATU policies and procedures.

Appendix 3: Indicative Outcomes of Stage 3

Indicative outcomes of Stage 3 may include one or more of the following:

- i. uphold the decision of Stage 2
- ii. modify the decision of Stage 2
- iii. overturn the decision of Stage 2
- iv. make non-binding observations relating to a substantive problem for ATU to consider.