UNIVERSITY CENTRE REASEHEATH STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

University Centre Reaseheath (hereafter referred to as UCR) will always strive to provide the highest quality of service to our students. However, we recognise that sometimes things can go wrong and UCR students may wish to make a complaint or tell us about a concern. This policy sets out how UCR students can make a complaint and how we will deal with complaints, as well as where students can take their complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

1.1 PURPOSE

This policy is intended to:

- Clearly define the meaning of a complaint.
- Give a clear understanding of how to make a complaint.
- Make sure that we deal with legitimate complaints in a fair, prompt, and efficient way.
- Make sure that the same fair and consistent process is available to every student who makes a complaint.
- Protect the interests of any student making a complaint.
- Enable our staff to manage complaints effectively.

1.2 MEANING OF COMPLAINT AND SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

This policy is for students at UCR who have a complaint about any of the following matters:

- A failure by UCR to follow its own policies and procedures (procedural irregularity).
- The standard of academic and non-academic services (excluding academic judgment).
- The provision of academic and non-academic facilities.
- The conduct or actions of a member, or members of staff.
- Misleading information about academic programmes, UCR support services and facilities.

This policy is not for complaints about any of the following matters:

- Matters relating to the student disciplinary procedure.
- Academic appeals/judgments.
- Appeals against disciplinary decisions.
- Any kind of harassment as defined in UCR's G12: Learner Harassment and Bullying Procedure.
- Refusal of admission to applicants who have not met academic entry thresholds; or where there is evidence that they cannot (or are likely to be unable to) meet the academic, professional (such as DBS checks) or vocational requirements.

Policies and procedures can be found via https://ucreaseheath.ac.uk/about/policies/

1.3 FRIVOLOUS OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

We understand that when a student contacts us with what they believe is a complaint, it is a complaint to them, whatever others might think. We are sensitive to the fact that if a student raises the same or similar issues repeatedly despite receiving a full response, there may be underlying reasons for the persistence. Our main consideration will be the issues raised in the complaint. Deciding whether a complaint is frivolous or vexatious has no rigid test or definition although it can be characterised in a number of ways, including:

- Pursuing complaints which have no merit and/or unrealistic outcomes.
- Pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- Demands for redress, which lack any serious purpose or value.
- Complaints designed to cause disruption or annoyance.
- Complaints that are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious.

If we decide that a complaint is frivolous or vexatious, we will write to the student explaining that we are ending our consideration of the complaint and we will give reasons for our decision. If the student wishes to appeal against our decision, they may write to the Vice Principal, who will review the information on file, including any representations the student has made, and decide whether to confirm the decision that the complaint is frivolous or vexatious or to reopen our review.

2. HOW WE WILL DEAL WITH COMPLAINTS

2.1 OUR COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS

We aim to investigate complaints in a way that:

- is fair.
- encourages informal resolution of problems and facilitates their early resolution if possible.
- treats complaints with appropriate seriousness and confidentiality.
- feeds back into UCR's systems to ensure that we can improve our service to students.

In addition, we confirm that:

- All complaints will be thoroughly and objectively investigated.
- In accordance with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, all students will be treated equally regardless of their status and will not be treated adversely as a result of their making a complaint.
- Every attempt will be made to resolve issues on an informal basis in the first instance, without recourse to a formal procedure.
- Where at any stage the complaint becomes a formal meeting or hearing, students are entitled to be accompanied by a member of staff or fellow student, who is not involved in the complaint.
- Our complaints process is an internal process and does not have the same degree of formality as a court of law. In most cases, it will not be necessary or appropriate for a student to be legally represented at a complaint meeting or hearing. Students are not entitled to bring legal representation without first agreeing with us whether it is necessary and making arrangements with us in advance of any meeting.

- Complaints should be made in writing using the FC1 form. This can be submitted by post, fax, or email. We will make reasonable adjustments to our complaints process should this be necessary for a student to access the process.

3. MAKING A COMPLAINT

3.1 STUDENTS

Only students registered and enrolled on or who have recently completed a programme of Higher Education at UCR are entitled to make a complaint.

3.2 TIME LIMITS

There are some key time limits on making complaints.

For current UCR students:

- Within 20 working days of the problem or matter complained of - students should make a complaint as soon as possible and at the latest within 20 working days after they are aware of the problem.

For former UCR students:

- Within three months of leaving UCR - Students must make a complaint within three months of the conferral of their award or withdrawal from their programme.

Occasionally, a student's exceptional circumstances may mean that they are not able to meet these time limits, for example because of illness or circumstances beyond their control. We will take this into account when we apply these time limits.

3.3 COLLECTIVE COMPLAINTS

Where issues raised in a complaint affect several students, those students can submit a complaint as a 'group complaint.' Where this happens, in order to manage the administration and progression of the complaint, we will normally ask the group to nominate one student to function as a group representative.

3.4 APPOINTING A REPRESENTATIVE

Students must make complaints themselves, and we cannot normally accept complaints by third parties on behalf of a student. However, some students may be unable to make a complaint on their own and may need support. In these circumstances, a permitted third party, (for example a family member or friend) can make the complaint on behalf of the student provided that the student has given written confirmation of the request and the Dean of Higher Education has approved the request.

3.5 MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY

We will manage complaints with an appropriate level of confidentiality, with information released only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint. We will not tell any third party any more about the investigation than is strictly necessary in order to obtain the information required from them.

By signing a letter of complaint, a student agrees that we can process and store the information it contains for the purposes of the complaint's procedure. The proper investigation of a complaint may necessitate the disclosure of confidential information. Should this be the case, the student

making the complaint will be notified to check that they wish to proceed with the complaint. Should a complaint involve the conduct or actions of a member of staff, that member of staff will have the right to see any evidence or documents relating to the complaint as part of the investigation.

3.6 MONITORING COMPLAINTS

We will review the number and outcomes of complaints and may report this to internal quality assurance forums with a view to improving our customer service. Monitoring reports will not contain any personally identifiable information.

4. HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT – THE PROCESS (Flowchart provided at Appendix 1)

4.1 Stage 1: Informal resolution

UCR encourages students to raise concerns, questions, and problems promptly and responsibly. Swift expression of concerns directly with the member of staff involved will normally lead to a quick and satisfactory informal resolution of most issues. In the first instance students should contact the member of staff by telephone, email or by making an appointment to see them. Students should also think about whether their concern can be communicated using our feedback methods, such as the "Tell UCR" platform, UCR Student Council, student surveys or via the personal academic tutor or Course Leader.

For monitoring purposes any informal concerns raised, and actions taken with module tutors, personal academic tutors or course leaders will be recorded via Pro-Monitor. If a student remains dissatisfied, they may lodge a formal complaint under Stage 2 of the process outlined below.

4.2 Stage 2: Formal complaint

Current students should submit a formal complaint in writing using the Formal Complaint form (FC1) to the Dean of Higher Education within 20 working days of the incident complained of (or within 3 months of leaving/graduating). They should set out the outcome or remedy that they are seeking. The student must be clear as to the nature of the complaint and, wherever possible, quote times, dates and details that allow the investigation to focus on the key matters. A Formal Complaints Form (FC1) is provided in Appendix 2 of this policy.

The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 UCR working days and via the method of communication it arrived, i.e., email, post etc.

The Dean of Higher Education (or nominee) will investigate the issue, either personally or with the appropriate manager(s). It may be necessary to contact the student to gather further information or understanding of the context and complaint itself and a meeting may be arranged with the student, if necessary.

The student should normally expect a full written response to their complaint within 10 UCR working days. However, there may be periods when this timeframe is not possible such as during holiday periods, due to staff availability or the complexity of the complaint. If this is the case, we will inform the student of the expected timeframe.

4.3 Stage 3: Appeal of Stage 2 Outcome

If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 response, they may request a review of the Stage 2 decision, which must be based on one (or more) of the following grounds:

- There is new evidence that would have significantly affected the Stage 2 outcome, and which could not have been made available when the Stage 2 complaint was submitted.
- That UCR did not properly follow its own procedures in dealing with the complaint and this demonstrably affected the outcome of the complaint (material procedural irregularity).
- That the decision taken at Stage 2 was so manifestly unreasonable that it was not a possible conclusion that a similar Stage 2 investigation might have reached.

The student should write to the Reaseheath College Vice Principal (Curriculum and Quality) within 10 working days of the date of the Stage 2 outcome letter, setting out the grounds (this must be one or more of the grounds set out in the bullet points above) for challenging the Stage 2 outcome. The student should set out any new evidence, with an explanation for why this evidence was not available at the time of the original complaint.

The Vice Principal or their nominee will review the handling of the complaint in the light of the student's written statement and decide whether or not the student has established grounds to refer their case to a Complaints Review Panel. The Vice Principal (or nominee) will notify the student in writing of the decision within 10 UCR working days.

If grounds have not been established, a Completion of Procedures letter (referred to as a COP) will be issued. The Completion of Procedures letter exhausts UCR's internal procedures. The student will be informed that they can contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) (see section 4.6). (Example COP letter is provided in Appendix 3).

If there are grounds, the Complaints Review Panel (see section 4.4 below) will be organised within 20 UCR working days of the Vice Principal's decision.

4.4 Complaints Review Panel

The student has the right to appear before the Complaints Review Panel on the date arranged for hearing the review or to submit a written statement to be considered at the hearing. If the student fails to attend the Complaints Review Panel hearing, the panel has the right to decide the matter in their absence.

As the Complaints Review Panel is an internal process, it will not be necessary or appropriate for a student to be legally represented at a hearing. Students are not entitled to bring legal representation without first agreeing with us whether it is necessary and making arrangements with us in advance of any meeting.

The Complaints Review Panel will have access to all previous correspondence and the results of the initial investigation. It will have the right to meet with and interview anyone referred to in the complaint and if the complaint refers to the actions or behaviour of any person, that person will have the right to appear before the panel or to submit a written statement.

The student will normally receive written confirmation of the Complaints Review Panel's conclusions and any action that UCR will take as a result of the review, within 5 UCR working days of the hearing.

The decision of the Complaints Review Panel is the final stage of UCR's complaints procedure, and a COP will be issued.

Membership of the Complaints Review Panel:

- A member of the Executive leadership team (Chair).

- A member of the Board of Governors or co-opted member of a Board of Governors' Committee.
- The President of the Student Association or their nominee.

The secretary to the Complaints Review Panel will be the Dean of Higher Education or their nominee. The secretary to the panel will not be part of the decision-making process.

4.5 Stage 3: Review and Completion of Procedures (COP)

4.5.1 Unresolved complaints concerning academic standards and/or the quality of the learning experience

4.5.1.1 University of Chester-affiliated students

Normally University Centre Reaseheath will issue the Completion of Procedures Letter, however in some circumstances, following a review of a complaint, the Completion of Procedures Letter will be issued by the University of Chester.

You are entitled to request a Completion of Procedures Letter at an earlier point provided you confirm you understand that you do not meet the grounds to request a review according to the relevant procedures.

For information relating to an academic appeal please visit: Academic Appeals | University of Chester

4.5.1.2 Other UCR students (not affiliated with UoC)

If a student remains dissatisfied after completing all stages of the UCR complaints process, they are entitled to ask the OIA, an independent ombudsman service, to look at the complaint. See Section 4.6 for further details.

You are entitled to request a Completion of Procedures Letter at an earlier point provided you confirm you understand that you do not meet the grounds to request a review according to the relevant procedures.

4.6 The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)

UCR is a member organisation of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

If a student remains dissatisfied after completing all stages of the UCR complaints process, they are entitled to ask the OIA, an independent ombudsman service, to look at the complaint. The OIA will only consider complaints from students who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of UCR's internal complaints procedures and processes.

All applications to the OIA must not be unduly delayed and be made within twelve months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter issued by UCR (or UOC where applicable) https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters.

The OIA look at issues such as whether we and the validating partner (where applicable), followed our procedures, whether those procedures were reasonable, and whether the final decision was reasonable in the circumstances. The OIA cannot normally look at complaints:

- Where the student has not progressed through all stages of the complaints procedures;
- Where the complaint refers to matters more than three years old;
- Where matters have been or are being considered in court.

The OIA's Scheme Rules and guidelines are available on its website: www.oiahe.org.uk

OIA Third Floor
Kings Reach,
38-50 Kings Road,
Reading RG1 3AA
Tel: 0118 959 9813

4.5.2 Complaints concerning non-academic issues

From time-to-time students will experience problems outside of their studies, including but not limited to funding, behavioural, catering, or residential worries. These issues are fundamental to enhancing the student experience and as such, are treated with the same due care and diligence as those complaints concerning academic standards. However, where complaints concerning non-academic issues escalate to a formal complaint (section 4.2 Stage 2), the processes set out under sections 4.3 (Stage 2 Outcomes) and section 4.4 (Complaints Review Panel) should be followed.

5. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

5.1 Inclusion Policy

Where a student has declared a disability to the UCR, all endeavours will be made to ensure that information is available to them at all stages in appropriate formats and that reasonable adjustments are made to the proceedings and facilities to accommodate their needs. (In accordance with the Reaseheath Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy).

5.2 Student Support

If a student is considering making a complaint, advice can be sought from a number of sources. These may include one or more drawn from the following list:

a) Personal Academic Tutor/ Course Leader/Programme Leader

b) Student Union

c) Student Course Representative

Students may wish to contact one or more of the above to discuss if their concern should be considered a complaint in either the informal or formal sense, or if there are alternative ways of reducing their concern. They may also contact one or more of the above to seek guidance and support on understanding the requirements of the complaints procedure. A student making a complaint has the right to be accompanied at any formal meetings or hearings concerning their complaint by a member of staff or fellow student, who is not involved in the complaint

5.3 Policy Monitoring

The Vice Principal (Curriculum and Quality) has overall responsibility for this policy. The Dean of Higher Education is responsible for implementing and monitoring this policy. Monitoring will involve:

- All complaints will be recorded centrally, will be subject to a monitoring, and reporting system
- Any member of staff receiving notification of a complaint from a student studying a Higher Education programme must forward it to the Dean of Higher Education as soon as they receive initial notification
- All complaints will be dealt with constructively and in the spirit of learning from experience and improving the customer experience. Where a complaint is upheld, UCR will take reasonable action within its power to ensure that similar situations do not occur in the future.

An annual written report to be approved by the Vice Principal will be submitted to the Higher Education Committee (Board of Governors Committee Meeting) and HE Academic Board. This report will detail complaints investigated during the year, which will include comment on whether outcomes have been appropriate. This information will be shared with our University Partners.

- This policy will be reviewed annually.

5.4 Linked Policies

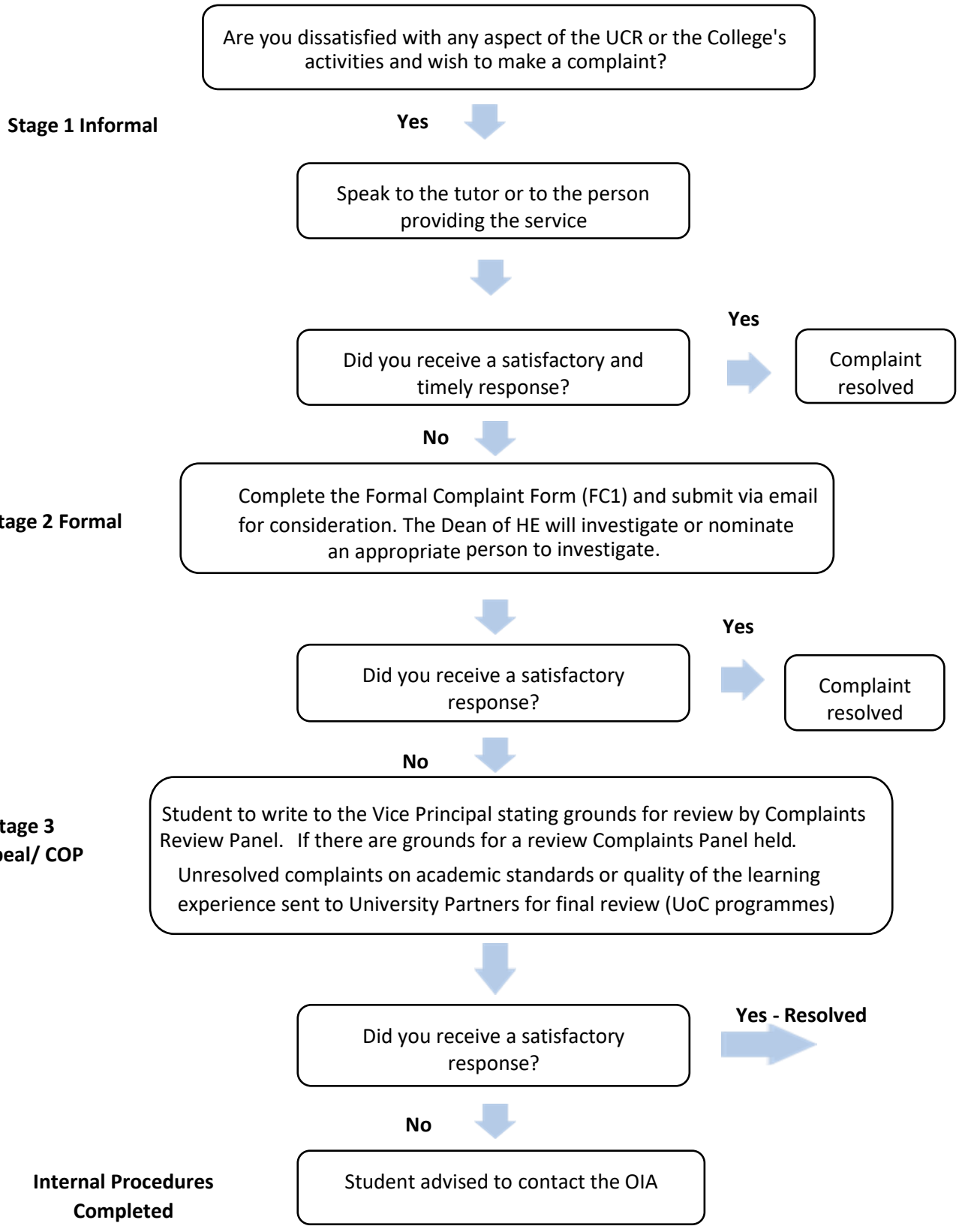
University Centre Reaseheath Student Contract; Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy.

5.5 Appendices

1. UCR Student Complaints Procedure Summary Flowchart
2. UCR Student Complaints Form
3. Example Completion of Procedures Letter (COP)

Date of issue	June 2026
Lead	Assistant Principal and Dean of HE
Approved	Executive Ratified/approved (if applicable): HE Committee: 18.06.26
Review	June 2027

UCR Student Complaints Policy Appendix 1
UCR Student Complaints Procedure Summary Flowchart



University Centre Reaseheath (UCR) Student Complaints Procedure
Formal Complaints Form (FC1)

Prior to completing this form, you are able to report your concern informally to your personal academic tutor, course leader, or programme leader.
This form is designed for use at the Formal Stage of UCR's Student Complaints Procedure. Please ensure that you have read and understood the Procedure before completing this form. The completed form should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Dean of Higher Education.

OFFICE USE ONLY:

Reference Number:	
Date Received:	
Received By:	

PART 1 - COMPLAINT DETAILS (Please complete sections in full)	
Section A: Complainant(s) Details	
Title:	
Forename:	
Surname:	
Address for response:	
Course:	**Level: Year 0/ 4 / 5 / 6**
UCR Student No:	
Email Address:	
Telephone Number:	
If the complaint is on behalf of several students, please complete the above information for each complainant on an additional sheet as appropriate. Additional sheets should be attached to this form and a tick placed in the box to indicate the presence of additional sheets ☐	
SECTION B: DETAILS OF COMPLAINT	
Please set out clearly and concisely the main points of your complaint and why you are complaining. You should also include details of dates, locations, and any witnesses.	

If the complaint is on behalf of several students, please complete the above information for each complainant on an additional sheet as appropriate. Additional sheets should be attached to this form and a tick placed in the box to indicate the presence of additional sheets ☐
SECTION C: OUTCOME SOUGHT
Please indicate a reasonable outcome or future action you are wanting in resolution to your complaint.
Please suggest any future action that can be taken by the University Centre Reaseheath to prevent this issue recurring.
If the complaint is on behalf of a number of students, please complete the above information for each complainant on an additional sheet as appropriate. Additional sheets should be attached to this form and a tick placed in the box to indicate the presence of additional sheets ☐
SECTION D: PREVIOUS RESOLUTION SOUGHT
Before a complaint may be raised formally all reasonable steps must have been completed to raise the complaint informally. If you have tried to resolve your complaint informally, please say what steps you have taken and who you raised the matter with.
What was the outcome and why are you still dissatisfied?
If the complaint is on behalf of several students, please complete the above information for each complainant on an additional sheet as appropriate. Additional sheets should be attached to this form and a tick placed in the box to indicate the presence of additional sheets ☐

SECTION E: DECLARATION BY COMPLAINANT(s)

I (we), the undersigned, submit this form pursuant to stage 2 of UCR'S Complaints Procedure. I agree under the Data Protection Act 2018 that any information given on this form may be shared with appropriate parties in the active resolution of my complaint including, where necessary, anyone I have complained about. I also give explicit consent that records relating to my studies or other associated matters (including those relating to assessment and/or requests made by me for mitigating circumstances to be considered and held by Academic and/or other University departments including Registry Services, Student Futures may be accessed, as necessary, in order to investigate my complaint. I further declare that this complaint is submitted in good faith and is not frivolous, malicious, nor vexatious.

Signed (Complainant): ……

Date: ……

PART 2 To be completed by the Office of the Dean of Higher Education	
Name of Complainant:	
Level:	Year 0 / 4 / 5 / 6
Date acknowledgement sent:	*(Must be within five working days & copy attached)*
Due date for completion of complaint:	*(Within ten working days)*
Action taken: *(including dates, times, names of those present at meetings, all minutes or notes at meetings should be attached to this form)*	
Complaint outcome:	
Date of completion of complaint:	*(Within ten working days)*
Date of letter of notification of outcome:	*(Within ten working days & copy attached)*
Important Note: Under the DPA 2018 & FOIA 2000 complainants may be entitled to access data and information contained on this form and other information relating to the complaint. In the event of a complaint being referred to the OIAHE this form and accompanying minutes, etc. may be submitted to the OIAHE as evidence and will as a matter of course be disclosed to the complainant by the OIAHE.	

UCR Student Complaint Policy Appendix 3

Example Completion of Procedures (COP) letter

University Centre Reaseheath Reaseheath College
Nantwich
Cheshire
CW5 6DF

Date

Address one
Address two
Address three
County
Postcode

STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Dear *[Name of complainant]*,

Completion of Procedures Letter

This letter confirms that the internal procedures of University Centre Reaseheath (UCR) / Reaseheath College (RHC) in relation to your complaint regarding *[please describe]* have been completed.

The issues that you raised in your complaint were *[details]*

The issue(s) that were considered in relation to your complaint was/were*: *[brief summary of the complaint etc].*

The final decision of the College is *[detail]* because *[reasons].*

The procedures/regulations applied were: *[details and date as supplied to the OIA's electronic Regulations Bank].*

Under the Higher Education Act 2004 the College subscribes to the independent scheme for the review of student complaints. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you may be able to apply for a review of your *complaint/appeal** to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) providing that the complaint you take to the OIA is eligible under its Rules.

Should you decide to make a complaint to the OIA, your OIA Complaint Form must be received by the OIA within 12 months of the date of this letter, that is, it must be received by the OIA on or before *[insert date - e.g., if the Completion of Procedures Letter is dated 7 January 20229, this date should be 7 January 2022].*

The OIA's leaflet, 'Introduction to the OIA for students,' can be downloaded from https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/can-you-complain-to-us and a link to the OIA Complaint Form is available on page 8. Alternatively, you can telephone or write to the OIA for a form. You should send a copy of this letter to the OIA with your OIA Complaint Form.

Guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can also be found on the OIA's website https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us. You may also wish to seek advice from the National Union of Students about taking your complaint to the OIA.

Please note that the OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with through UCR's internal procedures.

Yours sincerely,

[Authorised signatory]

*Delete/complete as appropriate.