

Managing engagement with the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Lancaster University and its Regional Teaching Partners

This document sets out the protocols for managing engagement with the Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). In particular it identifies when final Completion of Procedures letters (CoP) should be provided by the College (the delivery provider) and when by the University (the awarding provider). It has been formulated following OIA guidance available via their website at: www.oiahe.org.uk.

These protocols are written in the context of the following documents:

- A. The memoranda of agreement between Lancaster University and each of its regional teaching partners;
- B. Lancaster's Manual for Academic Regulations and Procedures, particularly those sections relating to collaborative provision;
- C. The relevant documents within each of the colleges.

These protocols operate on the following principles and conditions

1. Processes for managing appeals, complaints and similar activities will be clearly set out, easily available to students and adhere to the rules of natural justice;
2. Processes will have been developed in cognisance of OIA guidelines, operating frameworks and expectations, and each institution will respect the judgement of OIA as the independent ombudsman for the HE sector;
3. Where, owing to its multiple partnerships, a College has multiple approaches to a single process, for example student appeals, those relevant for Lancaster validated provision will be clearly and easily identifiable;
4. Decisions on which body produces the final CoP letters will be based on the principle of ultimate responsibility.
5. Lancaster University, through the Academic Quality Standards and Conduct Team, will be aware of, and have, as appropriate, approved relevant College procedures;
6. Primary operational communications and responsibility will lie with named persons at each institution. For Lancaster University this will be the University Complaints Co-ordinator; for X College this will be y. Other staff will be involved as required.

Details of each institution's procedures are available outwith these protocols.

It is recognised in these protocols that some student activities do not sit uniquely in one category, and may involve elements of more than one. Where this is the case discussions will take place between Lancaster and the partner College to determine which process will be followed and which institution will produce the CoP if required. If it is unclear or if there is disagreement over which institution should produce the CoP, the default position is that it should be Lancaster.

Each College will maintain records of activities under each of these categories and will report these to the Partnership Management Group on an annual basis for consideration and potential identification of issues requiring action.

Process:

1. Procedures are initiated by student (appeal or complaint)
2. Where it is not immediately clear which process should be used, the College considers under which set of procedures the submission will be managed and agreed this with the student. If necessary procedural points can be discussed with the University.
3. College procedures, approved by University as required, are followed with transparency and robust communication.
4. At the completion of the College's procedures a letter is supplied to the student containing: (a) the outcome; (b) the rationale (to be as detailed as required to allow students to understand the decision taken); (c) any related paperwork (notes of meetings, etc.); (d) an indication of next step to either Lancaster University or the Office for the Independent Adjudicator (determined in accordance with these protocols).
5. If next step is to Lancaster University – the University will undertake a prima facie review of materials submitted by students. If a mediated solution is possible it will be suggested. If not the University will either: (a) submit a CoP letter to the student; or (b) instigate a review of the materials using the Stage 3 review appeals or complaints procedures as set out in MARP.
6. If next step is direct to OIA – the College will provide the CoP letter to the student and manage any future engagement with OIA through its named point of contact using OIA guidelines and frameworks.

The protocol operates under the following definitions (please note that student here can mean both singular and plural):

Appeals: Action taken by a student who believes that there has been an error in an academic result (including assessment, awarding and classification). Possible errors include, but are not limited to: lack of full recognition of mitigating circumstance, procedural error and a breach of natural justice. Academic judgement cannot be appealed.

Complaint: Action taken by a student who believes that a non-academic service has not been appropriately delivered by either the delivery or awarding provider. This includes all services not explicitly considered through an appeals procedure.

Protocol Appeals: Arrangement: Managed within the College using University approved procedures. Student can seek University review.
Final CoP produced by: Lancaster
Rationale: Directly affects the award that is the ultimate responsibility of the University.

Complaints: Arrangement: Managed within the College using University approved procedures.
Final CoP produced by: College
Rationale: Deals with issues which are the ultimate responsibility of the college.