

# Complaints and Appeals Policy

Agreed: March 2024

Review date: March 2025

“Student” means a trainee teacher or apprentice who has enrolled with the Tommy Flowers SCITT. End Point Assessment candidates should refer to the EPA Complaints and Appeals Policy.

## 1. Office of the Independent Adjudicator

The Tommy Flowers SCITT (TFSCITT) is a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for students in Higher Education (OIA). The HEP Code is 043067. In processing complaints or appeals, the TFSCITT follows the guidance of the OIA, specifically the [Good Practice Framework](#), published in December 2022.

## 2. Complaints

A complaint is defined by the Good Practice Framework as *“an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about something a provider has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider”*. This may include:

- The TFSCITT not meeting obligations including those outlined in course handbooks
- misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or promotional material and other information provided by the TFSCITT
- concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching or administration
- poor quality of learning resources or facilities
- poor quality services
- events causing significant disruption to the normal delivery of a course, service or other aspect of the student experience, such as industrial action or a public health emergency
- bullying or harassment by another student or a staff member
- concerns about policies or procedures relating to financial support, immigration processes or welfare support
- concerns about a service delivered by other organisations or contractors on behalf of the TFSCITT that the student feels has affected their learning experience.

The following issues are not normally handled as complaints:

- a concern about a decision made by the TFSCITT or Northumbria University regarding student progression, academic assessment and awards, which would normally be considered under the academic appeals process (see below).
- a concern raised by a student about the outcome of their own disciplinary process. (At the end of any appeal process, the student could complain to the OIA.)
- a concern about a decision made under other specific regulations, such as fitness to practice. (At the end of any appeal process, the student could complain to the OIA.)
- matters relating to the Student Loans Company, which has its own complaints procedures.

A student complaint will usually be about something that has a direct impact on the person making the complaint. Where a student has a more general concern about policies or actions of the Tommy Flowers SCITT they should raise this directly with the Partnership Manager or through the student representatives of the Steering Committee.

Where any person involved in the Tommy Flowers SCITT wishes to raise a concern or make a complaint, they should in the first instance write to the Partnership Manager by email or in writing. If the complaint is regarding the Partnership Manager, the complaint should be sent to the SCITT Director. If the complaint concerns the SCITT Director, the complaint should be sent to the Head teacher of St. Paul's Catholic School. The TFSCITT is unable to accept complaints from third parties unless they are acting as a student's representative. The TFSCITT will ask the student to confirm that they accept the third party as their representative before agreeing a complaint or appeal from a third party on their behalf.

### 3. Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure the SCITT will consider ways to resolve a complaint.

**Early Resolution:** Where possible, the Partnership Manager will try to achieve an early resolution at a local level, usually with a face-to-face discussion with the student. The discussion may include giving more information or a more detailed explanation, suggesting solutions, being empathetic and understanding when there is no apparent solution or giving an apology where it is appropriate to do so.

**Formal Stage:** Where a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of early resolution, or where early resolution is not possible due to the nature, complexity or seriousness of the case, the complaint progresses to a formal stage. The student is asked to make a formal complaint in writing (e.g. by email) setting out the concerns clearly and concisely and providing evidence to support the issues raised, where possible. The Formal Stage is allocated to a member of staff who has not previously been involved in the matter. This member of staff will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days and aim to respond within 14 working days. They will inform the complainant if the complaint is going to take longer than 14 working days to resolve, detailing why it is taking longer to resolve and providing an indication of the date by which a resolution will be provided.

It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology
- An explanation
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

The TFSCITT will write a Completion of Procedures Letter to the student setting out the outcome at the conclusion of this stage setting out the student's right to take the complaint or appeal to the review stage, the grounds on which they can do so, the time limit for taking it to the review stage, the appropriate procedures and where and how to access support.

**Review Stage:** If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal stage, they may request a review on one of the following grounds:

- a review of the procedures followed at the formal stage
- a consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable
- to present new material evidence which the complainant was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process

Reviews will be handled at a higher level within the TFSCITT, usually by two specific members of the Executive Board who has not been involved at any previous stage. The members of the Executive Board will initially check the student's request for review is in time and meets the grounds set out in the Completion of Procedures. They will also consider:

- Were the relevant procedures followed during the formal stage?
- Was the outcome reasonable?
- Has the student received clear reasons why the complaint or academic appeal was rejected at the formal stage?
- If the student has provided new evidence that could have made a difference to the outcome, have they given good reasons for not supplying this earlier?

If the complaint or appeal is not upheld, outcome of the review will be communicated in writing to the student through a Completion of Procedures letter within 28 days. The letter will include a clear explanation and outline the reasons for the decision. It will also tell the student about their right to submit a complaint to the OI for review, the time limit for doing so and where and how to access advice and support.

Where a complaint or appeal is upheld, the TFSCITT will send the student a written outcome, explaining how and when it will implement any remedy and whether that includes an apology.

#### **4. Independent External Review (OIA)**

Once the review stage has been completed, the complainant is entitled to ask the OIA, the independent ombudsman service, to review the complaint about the outcome of the provider's complaints process. The time limit for bringing a complaint to the OIA is 12 months from the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter. Further information about how to complain to the OIA can be found at <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>.

#### **5. Academic Appeals**

An academic appeal is defined by the Good Practice Framework as "a challenge to or request for reconsideration of a decision by an academic body that makes decisions on student progress, assessment and awards. *This may include a request to change marks or progress decisions, or final award classifications.*"


The Tommy Flowers SCITT does not allow students (including Assessment Only candidates) to question the exercise of academic judgement, that is, a decision made by academic staff on the quality of the work itself or the criteria being applied to mark the work.

If students are dissatisfied with the conduct of an assessment (including the award of QTS) they may appeal to the Executive Body. An appeal must be made in writing within two weeks of the assessment to the Partnership Manager. Two members of the Executive Board will consider the grounds for appeal and reply within seven working days. The appeal will be considered only if the investigation of the complaint found that there had been

- a procedural irregularity in the assessment process
- bias or reasonable perception of bias
- circumstances affecting the student's performance where, for good reason, the academic body was not made aware of a significant factor relating to the assessment of a student when it made its original decision

- a challenge to the outcome of a student's request for additional consideration of personal circumstances which have affected their performance.

## 6. Authorisation

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| Signature:                             | <br>Jo-Anne Hoarty, Chair |
| Date of acceptance by Executive Board: | 7 <sup>th</sup> March 2024  |
| Review date:                           | March 2025  |