



Cranfield University Apprenticeship Concerns and Complaints Policy

Introduction

This document sets out the University's procedures for the management of comments, concerns or complaints made by employers about the University's apprenticeship provision. A separate Student Complaints procedure exists for apprentices who wish to make a complaint about any aspect of their apprenticeship course, as set out in the [Senate Handbook on Student Complaints](#). This procedure applies to postgraduate apprenticeships delivered by Cranfield University and apprenticeship courses it delivers at undergraduate level as MK:U.

Universities, like other public bodies, have a duty to conduct their affairs in a responsible and transparent way and to take into account both the requirements of funding bodies and the standards expected in public life. As part of its overall commitment to equality of opportunity, Cranfield University is fully committed to promoting a good and harmonious environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

The University recognises, however, that from time to time an employer may feel dissatisfied with some aspect of the University's delivery. The University will not accept complaints about academic judgement, or, through this procedure, complaints made by or on behalf of individual apprentices (which should be made through the Student Complaints procedure).

The procedures outlined in this document are open to employers whose staff are undertaking an apprenticeship with Cranfield University or MK:U. A complaint may be raised either by an individual line manager of an apprentice or by somebody acting on the employer's behalf. The University reserves the right to make a judgement on whether or not to consider formal complaints made anonymously.

Broad outline of the stages of an investigation

All investigations are managed in the following way:

STAGE 1	<i>informal investigation</i>	- the employer makes an informal complaint to either the Course Director, Cranfield Executive Development (CED) or the Apprenticeships Office. - complaint investigated informally and locally with swift resolution sought.
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Employers have the right to complain formally (Stage 2) at any time, but complaints are likely to be resolved more swiftly informally in the first instance.

STAGE 2	<i>formal investigation</i>	- detailed enquiries and a full and documented investigation is undertaken by the Head of the Apprenticeships Office (or a member of the Apprenticeships Quality Group (AQG)) to verify the nature and substance of any complaint and determine any appropriate redress. - outcomes may be the dismissal of the complaint, or any redress deemed appropriate by the Investigator.
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Employers who remain unsatisfied with the outcome of their complaint may request a review of any decision made at Stage 2 – see Stage 3

STAGE 3 *review*

- employers may request a review of the outcome of a Stage 2 investigation if they are unsatisfied.
- a Stage 3 investigation will be undertaken by a panel of AQQ members (independent of the Stage 2 investigation) to consider the Stage 2 investigation and recommend an outcome and redress (if appropriate).
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Stage 1 – Informal investigation

Stage 1 complaints investigations are undertaken informally and without a prescribed structure, in order that they may be dealt with promptly and allow for swift resolution where possible. Informal investigation and resolution help to ensure that misunderstandings are identified quickly, and that the process of resolving a complaint helps to build stronger relationships between the parties involved. All complaints should be submitted within a reasonable timeframe (normally twenty working days) of the incident(s) in question.

Informal complaints should be directed to either:

- The Course Director of the related course
- The Head of Centre for Executive Development (mark.threalfall@cranfield.ac.uk)
- The Apprenticeships Office (apprenticeships@cranfield.ac.uk)

In putting together an informal complaint, employers should identify:

- the exact nature of their complaint;
- specific examples which demonstrate what they are unhappy about;
- how they believe their complaint can be resolved;
- who they believe may be able to resolve the matter.

A Stage 1 investigation may take a number of forms but should be resolved as quickly as possible. While the University hopes that all complaints can be resolved informally, it recognises that employers may remain dissatisfied with the outcome of an informal investigation, or that staff may not be able to resolve a complaint locally. In such cases a Stage 2 formal complaint should be submitted.

Stage 2 – Formal investigation

Information for employers

If an employer believes that the result of the informal investigation (Stage 1) has been unfair or inappropriate, or that it did not adequately address their complaint then they may submit a Stage 2 complaint in writing to the Head of the Apprenticeships Office (via apprenticeships@cranfield.ac.uk).

It is important that any Stage 2 complaint is as comprehensive as possible. In order for it to be accepted and dealt with promptly the complaint should include:

1. Personal information
Name of employer, course concerned and the address that should be used for contact purposes.
2. The nature of the complaint
Employers should state clearly exactly what their complaint is about, with specific issues separately-numbered if relevant.
3. The evidence or circumstances leading to the complaint
Depending on the nature of the complaint, this may include:
 - a timetable or “story” of independent incidents, including dates and times;
 - emails or letters;

- a list of people who can verify that specific incidents have taken place, and that the investigators may wish to contact.

4. The remedy or remedies sought as an outcome

The Stage 2 complaint should state clearly what action the employer believes needs to be taken in order for them to feel satisfied that their complaint has been resolved.

5. An outline of what steps have been taken so far to address the complaint informally (Stage 1)

If this is not outlined in 3 above, employers should state clearly, providing dates and times of meetings, who they have already discussed their complaint with and what the outcome(s) of those discussions were.

On receipt of the submission of a formal Stage 2 complaint, the Apprenticeships Office will forward the complaint to the Head of the Apprenticeships Office, or to a member of the Apprenticeships Quality Group (AQG) to undertake an investigation. The investigator will contact the employer within ten working days of the submission of their complaint to confirm that they have been appointed to undertake an investigation.

If an employer has any concerns that the investigator(s) is too familiar with the case to undertake the investigation, or that there may be another conflict of interest they should raise this as soon as possible with the Apprenticeships Office, who will consider whether an alternative investigator should be appointed.

Information for Investigators

A formal investigation (Stage 2) requires all aspects of the allegation and investigation to be documented fully, and a report written. An investigator may feel it is necessary to have a formal and structured meeting with the employer who has made the complaint, at which notes must be taken.

On being appointed formally to commence an investigation, investigators should:

- assess whether there are any potential conflicts of interest that need to be considered;
- read the formal complaint submitted by the employer;
- contact the employer and explain who they are, and what their role is within ten working days of being appointed;
- outline the timescales expected for the investigation;
- outline that they are undertaking a full and formal investigation into the allegation and will review the complaint and provide a written report and any recommendations if appropriate.

All investigations will result in a formal report which will be provided to the employer, with copies retained by the Investigator and the Apprenticeships Office.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the investigator will complete a full and accurate report of their investigation, which should include a clear decision (with reasons given) on each element of the complaint and clear recommendations for redress or future improvements as appropriate.

Stage 3 – Review

Employers have the right to request a review of the Stage 2 decision where they feel that:

- the evidence provided to the Investigator was incomplete or inaccurate, to the extent where it is reasonable to conclude that the decision may have been different;
- that the investigator had summarily dismissed significant pieces of evidence in coming to their decision;
- that the investigator had not made clear recommendations on each element of the formal complaint;
- that the investigator were prejudiced or biased during the investigation, including any undisclosed conflicts of interest.

Any request for a review of a Stage 2 complaint should be submitted within twenty working days of the notification of the Stage 2 outcome.

Any review request should:

- (a) be submitted in writing to the Apprenticeships Office (apprenticeships@cranfield.ac.uk) within twenty working days of the conclusion of the Stage 2 investigation;
- (b) state clearly which of the grounds A, B, C and/or D above are relevant to the request;
- (c) provide a clear statement of the foundation for the request, and evidence to support this statement (b) above;
- (d) outline a preferred outcome or solution for any investigator to consider.

Any Stage 3 Review will be undertaken by a panel of 2-3 members of the Apprenticeship Quality Group, with one acting as panel chair, appointed by the Chair of the Apprenticeship Quality Group.

On being appointed, the chair of the panel should:

- a) assess whether there are any potential conflicts of interest that need to be considered;
- b) read the formal complaint submitted by the employer;
- c) contact the employer and explain who they are, and what their role is within ten working days of being appointed;
- d) outline the timescales expected for the investigation;
- e) outline that they are undertaking a full and formal investigation into the allegation and will review the complaint and provide a written report and any recommendations if appropriate.

The appointed panel will look at the Stage 2 investigation and outcome, and the further points raised by the employer. The stage 3 panel will review the original investigation and provide a final outcome and decision on the complaint.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the panel will complete a full and accurate report of their investigation, which should include a clear decision (with reasons given) on each element of the complaint and clear recommendations for redress or future improvements as appropriate. This will then be considered the final decision of the University.

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