

Apprenticeship employer complaints procedure

1. Background

The University of Reading uses a range of mechanisms to systematically gather employer feedback on its apprenticeship programmes. Feedback is a valuable source of insight for planning, implementing and monitoring apprenticeship delivery and quality improvement.

While the majority of the feedback shared with us by employers is positive, we recognise that on occasions employers may wish to express concern or dissatisfaction about aspects of our apprenticeship delivery, including by subcontractors.

Our commitment to high quality learning and development extends to the way we work with employers to resolve issues and concerns that they wish to raise. This procedure has been developed to provide a step-by-step guide to employers to ensure that concerns relating to Henley's apprenticeship programme delivery are resolved successfully at the earliest possible opportunity.

2. Scope and principles

- This procedure applies to any employer that is a party to a signed Employer Framework Agreement for the Provision of Apprenticeship Services with the University of Reading. This includes apprenticeship programmes with Henley Business School.
- A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction by an employer with any aspect of our apprenticeship programme, which requires a response from the University.
- The University will communicate clearly with the employer about the process and expected timescales at all stages of the procedure.
- Where possible, it is usually in the best interests of the employer and the University to resolve issues at the initial, informal stage of the procedure.
- Complaints received by the University will be treated in confidence in accordance with the Employer Framework Agreement.
- Disputes relating to matters of academic judgement will not be considered under this procedure and instead should be addressed via the University's student appeal process, available via this link: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/exams/Policies/exa-appeal.aspx>

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- Complaints will be monitored by an appropriate University operational group to make sure an accurate and timely response is provided by the University and to ensure that learning arising from complaints is incorporated within improvements to the way the University manages and delivers its apprenticeships. For Henley Business School apprenticeship programmes this will be the Henley Apprenticeship Management Group.
- A complaint or concern raised under this procedure is separate to the utilisation of any contractual dispute resolution mechanism.

3. Complaints procedure

Stage 1: Informal early resolution stage

The purpose of Stage 1 is to enable issues or concerns from employers to be dealt with swiftly on an informal basis. Discussion and negotiation at this point between the employer and the University is often a timely and effective way in which issues or concerns can be addressed.

Employers are asked to send an email to their University of Reading account manager. The email should explain the issue or concern, and we ask that in the message the employer:

- Is clear and succinct in describing the problem that requires resolution;
- Provides supporting evidence where available; and
- States the outcome they are seeking by raising the issue or concern.

The University will acknowledge all complaints within five (5) working days and will arrange a time to discuss the employer's concerns on an initial informal basis, to discuss the complaint normally within five (5) working days of confirming receipt of the complaint. The University will aim to resolve the complaint within ten (10) working days of the discussion with the employer. If the complaint cannot be resolved within this timescale, the employer will be kept informed about the progress of work to address the complaint.

Stage 2: Formal stage

If an employer is dissatisfied following the completion of the informal Stage 1 of the complaints procedure (as outlined above) and/or if they feel that the issue has not been appropriately resolved, they may choose to submit a formal complaint. Formal complaints must always be made in writing to apprenticeships@henley.ac.uk (or for complaints not related to Henley Business School apprenticeship programmes, to such email address that is notified to employers from time to time).

The written correspondence should be sent within five (5) working days of the employer being notified of the outcome of the informal stage of the complaint. If the employer has not yet sought to resolve the complaint via the informal stage, the University may refer the employer to the Stage 1 process if it is appropriate to do so.

The written complaint must include:

- a description of the complaint and any supporting documentation;
- information about the discussion undertaken at the informal Stage 1 process where applicable, setting out why the complaint has not yet reached a satisfactory resolution; and

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- any further information considered relevant

The University will acknowledge receipt of the escalation of the complaint from Stage 1 within five (5) working days of receiving it. The University will then contact the employer seeking a more detailed understanding of the background and drivers of the escalated complaint, seeking an appointment within five (5) working days of confirming receipt of the complaint.

The investigation report and Stage 2 outcome letter will usually be sent to the employer within twenty (20) working days of the receipt of more detailed information from the employer. Where a complaint requires a swift resolution (for instance if the complaint relates to the health and wellbeing of an apprentice), action will be taken to expedite the process however this needs to be balanced with the requirement to conduct a thorough investigation.

If the complaint is subsequently upheld, staff handling the complaint will liaise with a member of University senior management (for Henley Business School apprenticeship programmes this will be the Dean of Henley Business School, or their appropriately senior nominee) to agree remedial actions, which will be communicated to the employer through a Stage 2 outcome letter.

The outcomes resulting from investigation of Stage 2 complaints are likely to be one or more of the following:

- The identification of a solution to the complaint that the employer is happy to agree to;
- An explanation to the employer that their desired outcomes cannot be achieved; and/or
- An apology, where appropriate.

Dispute resolution

If the employer remains dissatisfied following the completion of this complaints procedure, it may wish to consider contractual mechanisms for dispute resolution set out in the Employer Framework Agreement.

If, following completion of the dispute resolution process, the employer considers that the complaint has not received an appropriate response, the employer may escalate the complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The ESFA's website describes the circumstances where a complaint may be escalated, and how to make a complaint:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure#checkcomplaint>

Version control

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Effective from	Next Review	Keeper (responsible for policy maintenance and review)
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