

STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

SECTION ONE – PRINCIPLES OF RAISING A COMPLAINT

Introduction

1. In this document, "we", "our" and "us" refer to Sheffield Hallam University. "You" and "your" refer to students at Sheffield Hallam University.
2. We are committed to providing high quality education and services to all students. We aim to provide a supportive environment and to be responsive to concerns when they are raised.
3. We are a large and complex organisation and we know that problems may arise from time to time about **teaching-related or service-related provision**. This could be about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service we provide. You are encouraged and expected to raise any problems or issues with us **immediately** so we have an opportunity to discuss these with you at an early stage. This prevents things becoming more complex and difficult to resolve. We take seriously all problems and issues raised with us and aim to deal with them in a timely, fair and consistent way. We will ensure that you are not disadvantaged as a result of raising an issue with us.

Stages

4. There are three stages of the complaint process:-
 - Early resolution of complaint
 - Stage 1 complaint resolution
 - Stage 2 complaint review
5. **Early Resolution** - Some issues are straightforward can be resolved very quickly (usually within 10 working days). You should raise issues at the time they arise and to try and resolve them with the member of staff most directly involved with the concern you have. Early Resolution is the opportunity to address matters with appropriate University staff without needing to complete and submit a Student Complaint Form.
6. **Stage 1 complaint resolution** – You can raise your issues via Stage 1 complaint resolution if you feel that the outcome of raising your concern through Early Resolution is not reasonable or fair, or is taking too long.
7. **Stage 2 complaint review** - You can ask for a review of the Stage 1 complaint resolution if you feel that the outcome of the concerns you have raised at is not reasonable or fair according to clear criteria. You cannot raise new issues at this point. This stage is a review of the process undertaken at Stage 1 – it is not a re-investigation of the issues raised at stage 1.

Principles

8. You should raise problems and issues with us in a reasonable way in line with the [Student Charter](#) and the Student Code of Conduct, which can be found in the Disciplinary Regulations for Students. You need to be clear and concise and to think carefully about what you want to achieve as an outcome.
9. Your concerns will be dealt with sympathetically and with respect for privacy and confidentiality. All information submitted in relation to complaints will be dealt with confidentially and will only be disclosed to those parties involved in the investigation and judgement of the complaint, or as is necessary to progress the complaint, or as required by law. In accordance with the [Student Privacy Notice](#), data from complaints is retained for a period of six years.
10. At all stages of the investigation we will be transparent and give you access to the information relevant to the case, subject to considerations of privacy and confidentiality, and the reasonable interests of any third parties.
11. If you believe you have suitable grounds for requesting a review of an **assessment decision** made by a Departmental Assessment Board, Extenuating Circumstances or Academic Conduct Panel, you should use the [Appeals Policy and Procedure](#). The outcome of an appeal cannot be made the subject of a complaint. We reserve the right to address issues you raise via the complaint process under the Appeals Policy and Procedure if the issues you raise are more suited to that process. If you submit an appeal form and a complaint form, we reserve the right to manage the issues under the most appropriate process.
12. If you are studying for a Sheffield Hallam award at one of our **collaborative partners**, you must raise any concerns with this partner in the first instance. As such, the Early Resolution and the Stage 1 complaint stages would be undertaken by the collaborative partner. We would undertake the Stage 2 complaint review stage.
13. Where a complaint concerns the conduct of a member of staff, a complaint investigator may be required to notify Human Resources of the details of complaint. A decision will then be taken as to whether and when a separate procedure is needed. Due to the confidential nature of any such proceedings, you will not be entitled to know the details of any subsequent action taken or the final outcome of any such proceedings involving members of staff.
14. If your concerns are related to the **behaviour of students**, then you should access the information provided in the [Student Disciplinary Regulations](#).
15. Where you are a member of a **group of students** raising a common issue with us, we will discuss with you how best to resolve the issue, e.g. depending on the number of students involved, it may be appropriate for you to nominate someone as the group representative to communicate on behalf of the group.
16. Only in exceptional circumstances can a **third party** raise issues or submit a complaint form on your behalf. You must request permission in writing stating reasons why you are unable to raise issues yourself. The Head of Student Policy and Compliance, or nominee, will decide if your reasons are acceptable.
17. Some complaints may concern matters which are **criminal offences**, and should be dealt with through law enforcement processes. In such cases you are strongly advised to report them immediately to the police. Where criminal investigations are under way, we may delay the progression of any complaint relating to the same matters until after the outcome of the investigation is known.

18. At any stage of the complaints process you can bring someone with you to any meetings held. This person is to support you during the meeting rather than to respond on your behalf. You are not permitted to have someone from the legal profession employed to work on your behalf at the meeting. We do not imitate the legal justice system and we believe that legal representation is unnecessary for both you and the University.
19. If you raise issues that are trivial or malicious or if you do not behave in line with the Student Code of Conduct, we may take action under the [Student Disciplinary Regulations](#). Where permission has been granted to a third party to raise an issue or submit a complaint form, we may, at any time, refuse to accept that representation any further if the third party pursues the case in a way which can be construed as being rude, aggressive, disruptive or otherwise improper. In such situations you will be able to take over pursuit of the case and engage an alternative third party should you wish to do so.

Timescales

20. You are expected to raise issues with us in a timely manner, usually at the point they are happening and certainly within the academic year in which they occurred. Issues raised outside the academic year in which they occurred will not be considered unless you can demonstrate there are valid reasons why you could not have raised them sooner. You are expected to state these on the complaint form. The decision on whether you have provided a valid reason will be made by the Director of Academic Services. If your complaint is ruled out of time then you will receive a Completion of Procedures letter which will explain how you can take your case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). If your concerns are investigated, decisions about the extent to which issues occurring in the previous academic year can be meaningfully addressed will be made by the Complaint Panel following recommendation from the complaint investigator.
21. Concerns raised by former students will be considered in accordance with the criteria set out above provided that they relate to issues that arose when they were still students at the University and that the case is initiated within 3 months of the termination or expiry of their enrolment contract with the University. We consider an enrolment contract to have expired upon the completion of a course, i.e. the date on which final results are issued. Whether and how any matters raised beyond this point are considered remains entirely at the university's discretion.
22. When you raise issues at the Early Resolution stage, we aim to respond to you within 10 working days. When you submit a formal stage 1 complaint form, we aim to investigate and reach a conclusion within 40 working days of the date you submit your Stage 1 Complaint Form. When you request a stage 2 review, we aim to respond to you with our final decision within 20 working days of the date you submit your Stage 2 Complaint Form.

Reporting and Monitoring

23. Outcomes of complaints may be shared with your College or relevant Directorate in order to learn from the issues raised by students. Where appropriate, it may also be necessary to inform a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body associated with your course and you will be informed where this happens
24. An annual report of formal complaints will be prepared and submitted for the consideration of key governance committees of the institution and ultimately for the Board of Governors. This report will be anonymous and will primarily focus on a statistical analysis of formal complaints against protected characteristics to provide assurance that the procedures have been fairly applied.

SECTION 2 – PROCEDURE FOR RAISING A COMPLAINT

25. If you are unsure how to pursue a complaint or have queries about this procedure, you should contact Hallam Help. If you wish to seek independent advice about your concerns, we recommend the Student Union Advice Centre as being the appropriate source of informed and independent support.

Early Resolution

26. You should speak to or email the member of staff most directly involved with the problem or issue that you have. This is likely to be one of the following:-
- module tutor or module leader
 - course leader
 - research degree supervisor/postgraduate research tutor
 - academic adviser
 - student support adviser
 - Hallam Help point
 - disability adviser
 - wellbeing practitioner
27. If you are not sure who to speak to, or you do not feel able to approach the person most directly involved, you can seek advice regarding this from Hallam Help, your student course representative, the Student Union Advice Centre or any of the people listed above.
28. Where appropriate, particularly where we have a complex group complaint, you will be advised to submit a formal Stage 1 Complaint Form to enable us to undertake a full investigation of the issues you are raising with us.
29. Sometimes the resolution you want might not be feasible or appropriate, or we may not be able to make changes straight away. Where you feel your concern has not been resolved, you may wish to submit a Stage 1 Complaint Form.

Stage 1 Complaint Resolution

30. To submit a stage one complaint you must complete a Stage 1 Complaint Form (SC1) which is available on [MyHallam](#). This form and any supporting evidence should be sent via email to appealsandcomplaints@shu.ac.uk.
31. The University Student Policy and Compliance team will determine whether:
- (i) the complaints procedure is appropriate, or whether the issue should be dealt with by some other university procedure, for example, the disciplinary procedure or the appeals procedure;
 - (ii) your concerns could still be resolved under the Early Resolution process, and decide how to progress towards resolution;
 - (iii) any aspects of the complaint are being raised out of time;
 - (iv) your complaint is considered to be trivial or malicious and should be dismissed.
32. You will receive an acknowledgement of receipt of your SC1 form within 3 working days.
33. Within 10 working days of receipt of the SC1 form, the investigator appointed from the Student Policy and Compliance team to investigate your case will contact you to discuss in further detail the issues raised. Your concerns will be investigated as quickly as possible while recognising the

need for a thorough investigation. You will be contacted every 15 working days to keep you informed of progress.

34. You can have a meeting with the investigator who may then decide that further meetings with you are necessary. You should make attendance at such meetings a priority. If you choose not to attend meetings which have been convened within a reasonable period of time, the investigator will continue the investigation and come to a conclusion. If you are unable to attend a meeting in person, we will offer a suitable alternative such as a telephone call or, where feasible, a video link.
35. The investigator will prepare a report of their findings and submit the report with a recommendation to the Stage 1 Complaint Panel. The Stage 1 Complaint Panel comprises up to three senior members of University staff, one of whom will be appointed as the Chair. No member of the Panel will have had any previous involvement with your case.
36. Once the Stage 1 Complaint Panel has reached a final conclusion on the case, you will be informed of the outcome and what action we will take, if any. You will be informed of the outcome and any actions that will be taken in writing.

Stage 2 Complaint Review

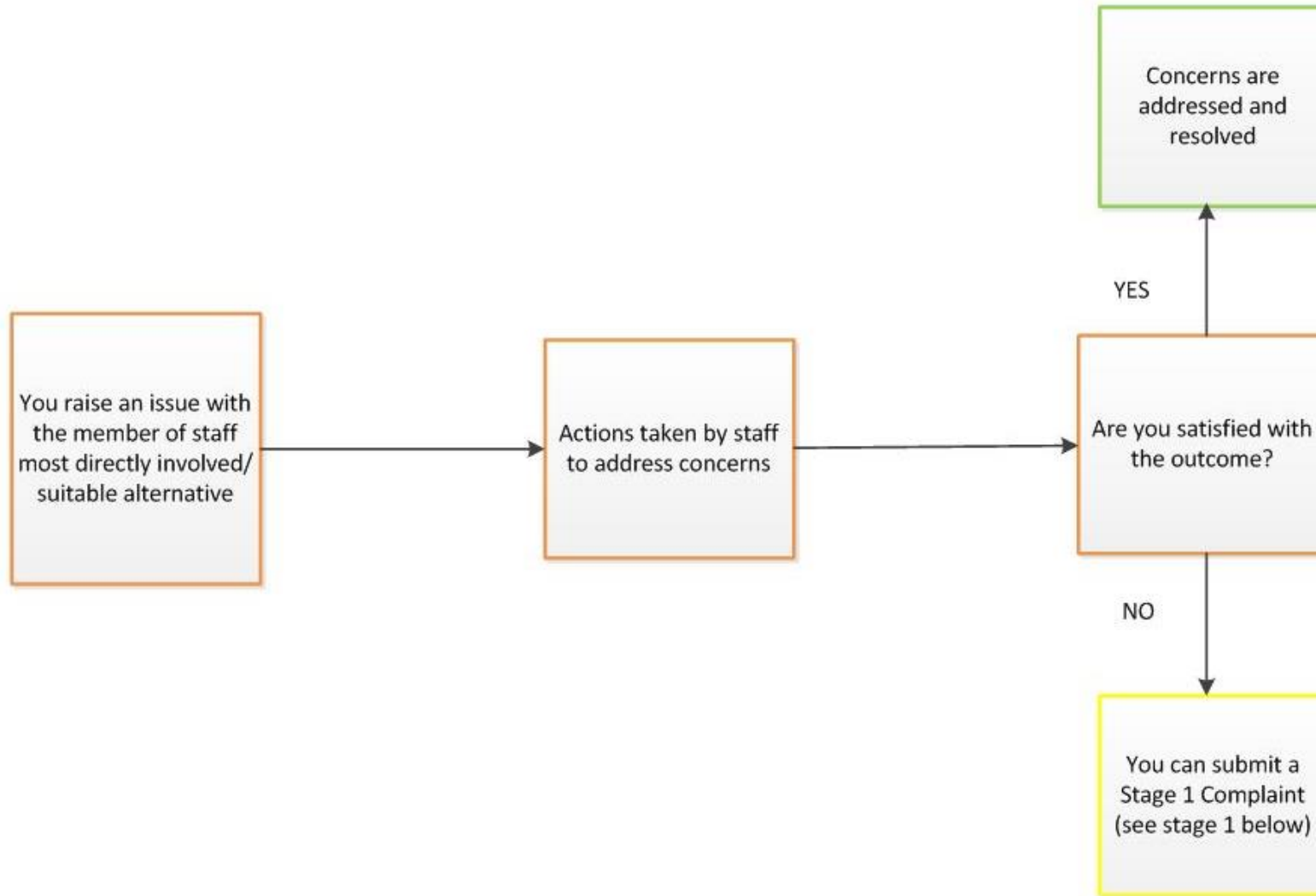
37. You can ask for a review of the Stage 1 complaint resolution if you feel that the outcome of the Stage 1 Complaints Panel is not reasonable or fair according to clear criteria. You cannot raise new issues at this point. This stage is a review of the process undertaken at Stage 1 – it is not a re-investigation.
38. To request a review you must complete the Stage 2 Complaint Form (SC2) which is available on [MyHallam](#). This form and any supporting evidence should be sent via email to appealsandcomplaints@shu.ac.uk. You should do this within 10 working days of receiving the written outcome of the Stage 1 Complaint Panel. Forms received beyond the 10 working day period will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where you have provided a valid reason, with evidence, for the delay.
39. You will receive an acknowledgement of receipt of your SC2 form within 3 working days.
40. The SC2 form requires a statement from you stating how your concerns have not been satisfactorily addressed at stage one. Your SC1 form and accompanying evidence will form part of the material which will be considered by the Stage 2 Complaint Review Panel. You do not need to resubmit these to us. However, you can comment on any evidence collected during the stage one process and submit any new relevant evidence.
41. Your case will be considered on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor by two members of staff from a pool of trained senior staff members. A Stage 2 Complaint Review Panel will be convened and you have the right to attend the panel meeting. No member of the Panel will have had any previous involvement with your case.
42. The nature and extent of the review will be at the professional judgement of the Stage 2 Complaint Review Panel members considering your case. It may include one or more of:
 - a review of the consideration of the complaint at stage one to see if this was conducted fairly and in accordance with normal procedures;
 - a review of the information available at stage one to see if more information is required;
 - a review of the reasonableness of the outcome of the Stage 1 Complaint Panel;
 - further investigation;
 - consideration of further evidence and related points, but not new complaints, submitted by you;

- any other action considered by the person considering the case to be appropriate.
43. Your concerns will be considered as quickly as possible while recognising the need for a thorough review. You will be contacted every 10 working days to keep you informed of progress.
44. You can have a meeting with the Stage 2 Complaint Review Panel. You should make attendance at such meetings a priority. If you choose not to attend the meeting, the Panel will consider the case and come to a conclusion. If you are unable to attend a meeting in person, we will offer a suitable alternative such as a telephone call or, where feasible, a video link.
45. Once the Stage 2 Complaint Review Panel has reached a final conclusion on the case, you will be informed of the outcome and what action we will take, if any. At this point, we have completed our internal procedures and you will be issued a Completion of Procedures statement.
46. If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you have the right to take your case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (the OIA). The OIA is the independent body appointed in the higher education sector to review complaints by students against higher education providers. The OIA will not normally consider a case until the internal procedures of the University have been exhausted and a Completion of Procedures statement is issued. Details of how to make a complaint and the deadlines by which such a complaint must be made can be found on the OIA's website.

Version:	1.7		
Original Version Approved by and date:	Board of Governors, 19 March 2013 (minute reference 13/42)		
Date for Review:	October 2020		
Owner :	Student Policy and Compliance, Academic Services		
Amendments since Approval:	Detail of Revision:	Date of Revision:	Revision Approved by:
	Clarifications to points 3, 4, 5 and 36	Reissued for 2015/16	
	Clarifications to points 14 and 25	Reissued for 2016/17	
	Clarifications: point 28 in relation to how students at collaborative partners raise complaints; point 30 in relation to the management of staff complaints; revised annexes - flow charts for the three stages of the complaints process	Reissued for 2017/18	Assistant Registrar (Assessment, Awards and Regulations)
	Clarifications: point 4 - indicative timeframe added point 6 - group complaint process clarified point 39 - retention periods for complaint data clarified	Reissued for 2018/19	Head of Student Policy and Compliance
	Updated job titles and terms to reflect new structure. Revised email address in point 9.	April 2020	Head of Student Policy and Compliance
	Format of document revised – split between policy and process. Clarifications of the process to align with central management of all complaint processing.	July 2020	Head of Student Policy and Compliance
Clarification on timescales for raising complaints	August 2021	Head of Student Policy and Compliance	

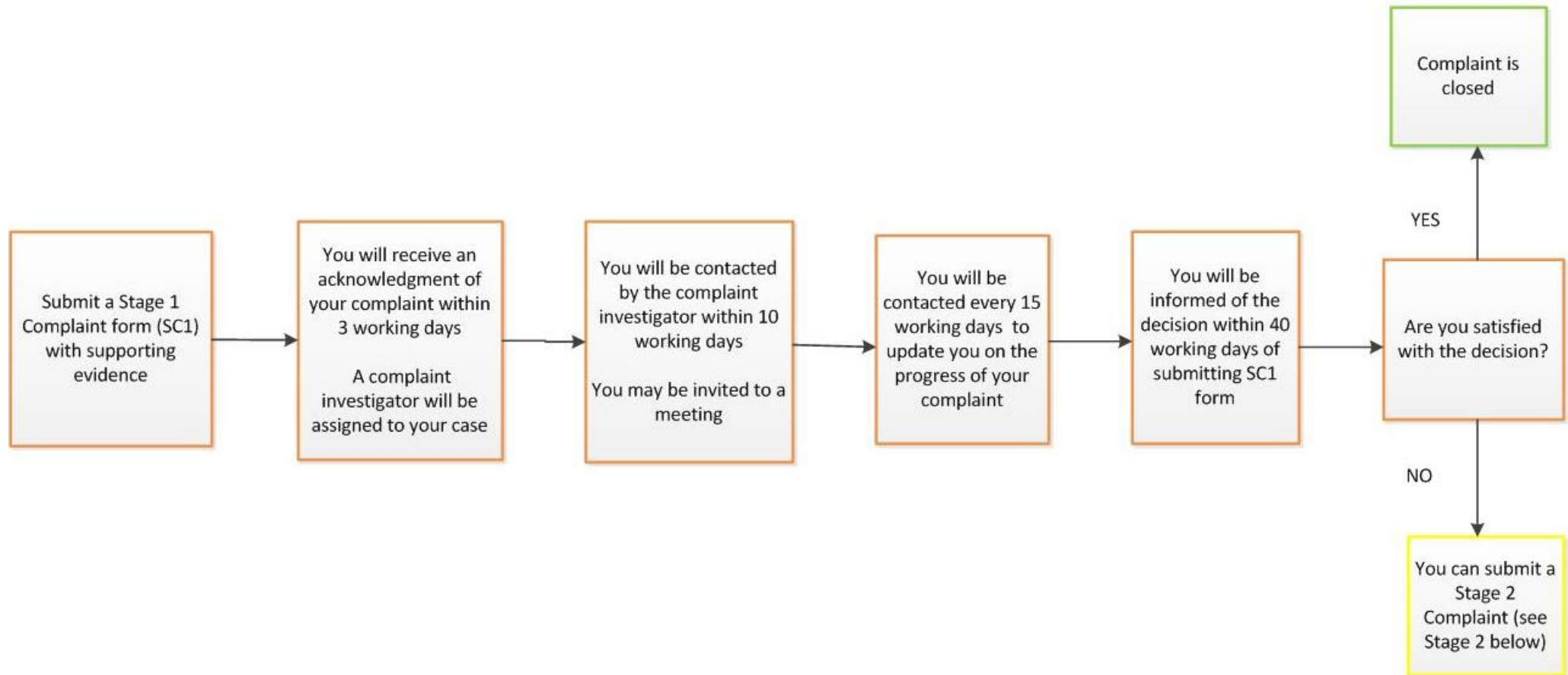
ANNEX 1a: EARLY RESOLUTION

You are encouraged to raise any concerns as soon as possible so these can be resolved quickly and efficiently without the need to submit a complaint form.



ANNEX 1b: STAGE 1 RESOLUTION

If you are not satisfied with the early resolution response or it is taking too long, you can submit a Stage 1 complaint.



ANNEX 1c: STAGE 2 REVIEW

If you are not satisfied with the Faculty resolution you can submit a Stage 2 complaint.

