

Good Practice Framework Steering Group

Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Good Practice Framework sets out principles and operational guidance to support higher education providers in England and Wales. It draws on our broad experience in handling complaints.

The Framework is intended to support providers to develop and follow fair processes, and to be a tool to help any provider to evaluate their own processes. It can also be a useful resource for students and those who advise them as guidance on what good complaints and appeals processes should look like.

The framework is not a mandatory model that all providers in our membership must follow. However, it informs the way we consider complaints and we may ask providers to give reasons for significant departures from the guidance.

We keep the Framework under review and update each section as and when required, including to reflect emerging good practice.

The Framework currently has six sections: Handling complaints and academic appeals, Delivering learning opportunities with others, Supporting disabled students, Requests for additional consideration, Disciplinary procedures, and Fitness to practise. The overarching Principles apply across all sections of the Framework. There is also separate guidance to explain what we mean when we talk about bias.

In February 2025, we announced our intention to develop a 7th section of the Framework, about responding to student concerns about Harassment and Sexual Misconduct. This will build upon some relevant content set out in the Handling complaints and academic appeals, and Disciplinary procedures sections.

Purpose of the Steering Group

We have reviewed a number of complaints from students relating to harassment and sexual misconduct and we are able to draw upon this experience in identifying elements of good practice. But we acknowledge the significant expertise of others working directly with students who have made complaints about experiencing behaviour of this type, or whose conduct has been considered through a disciplinary or similar process. We also value the perspectives of others working outside the higher education sector with experience in addressing complaints concerning harassment and sexual misconduct.

In developing the Framework, we always undertake an open public consultation which offers an opportunity for interested parties to comment on the draft Framework.

Prior to this, we convene a small Steering Group to assist us in preparing a draft.

Steering Group members:

- Provide information about existing legal and regulatory obligations that set the context for a provider's actions in response to students' concerns
- Give views about content it will be helpful to include
- Direct the OIA towards relevant existing guidance
- Offer perspectives on the practical implications for practice in a range of different HE provision, including e.g. professional and vocational courses including placements; partnership provision; provision at large and small scale.
- Offer perspectives on the benefits of different approaches to practice for students, including students reporting harassment and sexual misconduct, students whose conduct is being considered through a disciplinary or similar process, and the general student body.
- Share experience about existing good practice and approaches that have worked well
- Comment on draft versions of sections prepared by the OIA
- Draw upon the expertise of networks of which they are a member

The Steering Group members are not responsible for:

- Drafting or co-authoring the Framework
- Managing the administration or timeframe of the work
- Formally approving the final text

Membership of the Steering Group is voluntary and is not remunerated.

Anticipated Timeframes

The Steering Group is expected to convene for initial discussions in June and July 2025. It is anticipated that a first complete draft will be provided to the Steering Group for comment by the end of September 2025, with a public consultation taking place in late autumn 2025. Further consultation of the Steering group will take place in early 2026.

Meetings of the Steering Group take place online, usually via Teams.