

The International School of Veterinary Postgraduate Studies

Candidate Complaints Procedure

This procedure reflects the International School of Veterinary Postgraduate Studies' (ISVPS) commitment to recognising complaints. Our aim is to resolve any dissatisfaction as close as possible to the initial point of contact, and to conduct thorough and fair investigations of complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the facts of each individual case.

Please note this ISVPS complaint policy is for all candidates who are not enrolled onto the Postgraduate Certificate (PgC) with Harper Adams. If you are undertaking the PgC certification you will need to refer the PgC complaint procedure.

If you remain dissatisfied, having reached the end of the procedure outlined in the policy, you may wish to see whether your complaint is eligible for external review by the OIA. Further information can be found later in the policy and on the OIA website:

<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>.

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At ISVPS, we are committed to maintaining the highest standards in the delivery of our services. However, we recognise that, on occasion, issues may arise that require further attention. This policy outlines the process for candidates who wish to submit a complaint.

Please note that complaints and appeals are handled through separate policies and procedures. We encourage candidates to review both policies carefully to ensure they refer to the correct policy and process and that they submit the appropriate documentation.

If you are unsure whether this policy is appropriate for your circumstances, please contact your Customer Success team via english@ISVPS.org

Who is this policy for?

This policy is for candidates enrolled with ISVPS. A different complaint policy is available for those candidates who are also enrolled with Harper Adams University or are wishing to make a complaint regarding the course they have undertaken with Improve Veterinary Education.

What is a complaint?

1. For the purposes of this procedure, a complaint may be defined as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more candidates about the standard of service, action or lack of action provided by ISVPS”

2. A complaint may relate to:

- Failure of ISVPS to provide a service promised to you as referenced within the Contract (for definition see ISVPS Terms and Conditions).
- The quality of assessment support, provided by ISVPS or an ISVPS examiner
- Treatment by, or attitude of, a member of ISVPS, a partner, a representative or an examiner.
- The failure of ISVPS to follow an appropriate administrative process
- The refusal of a reasonable adjustment request under the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

3. This definition is very broad, and the previous list is not exhaustive; however, not every concern raised is a complaint. For example, the following **are not ISVPS complaints**:

- A request to a member of staff to revise the way in which they provide support or guidance, in order to allow the candidate to study more effectively.
- A routine, first-time request for a service.
- A request under the Freedom of Information Act or General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- A request for information or an explanation of policy or practice.
- An issue which is being, or has been, considered by a court or tribunal.
- An attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where an ISVPS procedure has been completed and a decision has been issued.
- **An appeal about an academic decision in relation to the award of grades and academic credit** (Please refer to The ISVPS Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure which is available in MyImprove Hub).

4. The issues in point 3 will be dealt with directly with individuals providing a service or under alternative appropriate processes rather than under the Complaints Procedure. It should be noted, however, that some situations can involve a combination of issues, some are complaints and others are not, and each case should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

5. Advice on the operation of the complaints handling procedure or on the appropriate procedure to be followed in a specific set of circumstances can be sought from ISVPS by email at english@isvps.org (email contact can also be found on www.isvps.org).

Who can make a complaint?

6. The complaints procedure covers complaints about a candidate's experience during their time enrolled with ISVPS. Only candidates who have actively confirmed their enrolment with ISVPS may make a complaint, within the timescales set out herein.

Collective Complaints

7. The normal expectation is that candidates will submit a complaint that relates to their own experience only. If a service is deemed to have failed several candidates, a collective complaint can be submitted by a nominated individual. All correspondence, including the final outcome, will be directed through this individual.

Frivolous or vexatious complaints

8. ISVPS may reject a complaint at any time if, in the opinion of the ISVPS nominee, The ISVPS Academic Board, or their nominees, the complaint is frivolous or vexatious.

9. A frivolous or vexatious complaint can be characterised in a number of ways:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious
- Insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason

- Insistence upon pursuing potentially meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value

Unacceptable behaviour

10. ISVPS is committed to providing a fair, consistent and accessible service for all candidates; however, ISVPS must also provide a safe working environment for staff and ensure that work is undertaken in an efficient and effective manner. Whilst all candidates have the right to be heard, understood and respected, staff have the same rights. The actions of complainants, or their nominated representative, who are angry, demanding, or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on, or unacceptable behaviour towards, staff. These behaviours are set out below:

- Aggressive, offensive or abusive actions or behaviour in any media

Examples of actions or behaviour grouped under this heading include any actions or behaviour that may have the potential to cause staff to feel intimidated, threatened or offended. These include, but are not limited to, threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, sarcasm and rudeness. Inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can amount to abusive actions or behaviour. Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm; it also

includes behaviour or language, whether oral or written, that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.

- Unreasonable demands or persistence

Examples of unreasonable demands may include: requesting responses within an unreasonable timescale; insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff; continual phone calls, emails, letters or social media posts; demanding answers to unreasonable, or an excessive number of, questions about the way in which staff would normally discharge their responsibilities or seeking their personal opinions on matters; repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns. When the actions or behaviour of a complainant or their representative is unacceptable, they will be told why it is unacceptable and given the opportunity to modify their actions or behaviour. If the unacceptable actions or behaviour continue, ISVPS will take appropriate measures, including terminating consideration of the complaint, issuing a Completion of Procedures letter, and/or legal action where appropriate.

11. If a candidate's complaint is considered frivolous or vexatious, or if the complainant's behaviour is unreasonable, the nominee (in consultation with HAU's Academic Registrar) will write to the candidate explaining that ISVPS is terminating further consideration of the complaint, setting out the reasons for doing so.

Time limit for making complaints

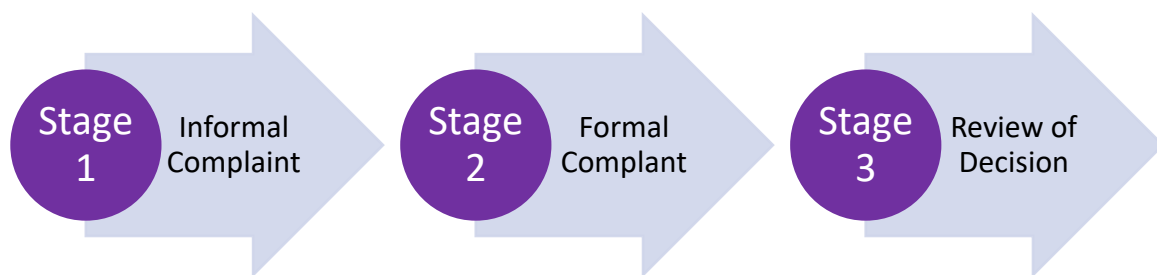
12. Complaints should be raised with ISVPS as soon as problems arise to enable prompt investigation and swift resolution. This complaints procedure sets a time limit of **28 working days** to raise a complaint with ISVPS, starting from when the complainant first became aware of the problem, unless there are special circumstances for requesting consideration of a complaint beyond this time.

13. Beyond the 28-day time limit, any discretion in the way that the time limit is applied must be agreed with the ISVPS nominee and will require evidence of mitigating circumstances that prevented the complainant from making their concerns known in a timely way, within the deadline.

The Complaints Procedure

14. The complaints procedure is intended to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process with a strong focus on early resolution. The procedure involves up to three stages, illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. The Complaints Procedure



The ISVPS nominee will inform the training provider and will discuss the nature of the complaint with a relevant member of the company in case the complaint involves both companies. Should a complaint be made pertaining to the Course delivery this Complaint would need to be addressed to Improve Veterinary Education and not ISVPS.

	Stage 1 (informal complaint)	Stage 2 (formal complaint)	Stage 3 (internal review)
Which Stage does my complaint fall under?	Stage 1 (information Complaint) seeks to resolve straightforward complaints swiftly and effectively at the point at which the complaint is made.	When a complaint has not been resolved at Stage 1 to the candidate's satisfaction	For a complaint which has not been resolved at Stage 2 to the candidate's satisfaction.
When should I raise my complaint?	As Close as possible to the Issue occurring (or within 28 working days of the problem).	Within 14 working days of receiving a written response from your stage 1 complaint.	Within 7 working days of receiving your written response to stage 2 complaint.
How do I raise my complaint	By emailing ISVPS via english@ISVPS.org Candidates must ensure they are informing the ISVPS recipient that they wish to make a stage 1 complaint to ensure the staff member is aware and will deal with the concerns accordingly. The specific concerns and the impact of the problem and the effect this has had on the candidate. Where	By emailing ISVPS via english@ISVPS.org and attaching your Stage 1 written response and your reason for escalating your complaint with any relevant evidence and the outcome you are hoping for. Candidates must complete and send in the Complaint form in English.	By emailing ISVPS via english@ISVPS.org and attaching your stage 2 written response and stating which of the below grounds - The stage 2 outcome was unreasonable - New Material Evidence which was not available at Stage 2. Candidates must complete and send in the Complaint form in English.

	relevant are the names of staff, contractors involved in the complaint and the outcomes the candidate is hoping for. Candidates must complete and send in the Complaint form in English.		
How is my complaint dealt with?	You will receive acknowledgement on receipt of your Stage 1 complaint within our standard response time of 2 working days Complaints addressed by any relevant member of staff (typically the Examination Coordinator or Customer Success Team).	You will receive acknowledgement on receipt of your Stage 2 complaint within our standard response time of 2 working days Formal complaints are dealt with by employees independent of the area of concern (typically the ISVPS Management team).	You will receive acknowledgement on receipt of your Stage 3 complaint within our standard response time of 2 working days The Chairman of ISVPS's Academic Board will review the outcome.
What outcome may I receive?	You may receive actions for a quick resolution; this may be in the form of an apology, an explanation etc.	You will be provided with a written response which will include reasons of any decisions taken, investigation made or recommendations.	You will be provided with a written response which will include a review of the Stage 2 and will provide results of the investigation made and the reasons for any decisions and recommendations.

	In exceptional Circumstances where the complaint may require a short extension to the time taken in responding, this will be communicated to the candidate with a new resolution date.	The written response will confirm conclusion of the stage 2. In exceptional Circumstances where the complaint may require a short extension to the time taken in responding, this will be communicated to the candidate with a new resolution date.	
When will I expect to receive an outcome from my complaint?	Within 28 working days.	Within 28 working days.	Within 28 working days.
What are the next steps?	If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your stage 1 you can escalate your complaint to a stage 2 within 14 working days of receiving your Stage 1 complaint.	If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your stage 2 you can escalate your complaint to a stage 3 within 7 working days of receiving your Stage 2 complaint.	If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your stage 3 complaint you can refer your complaint to the OIA for an external review.

15. Once ISVPS's Complaints Procedure has been exhausted, the candidate will receive a formal response email, which confirms that ISVPS's internal procedures are concluded in the form of a Completion of Procedures letter, post stage 3 review. Candidates are advised to contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the final stage of the complaints procedure, using the prescribed wording set out on the OIA's website (<http://www.oiahe.org.uk>). The OIA will determine whether the candidate's complaint is eligible for consideration under its rules.

Any correspondence to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for Higher Education must be conducted in English.

Maintaining confidentiality

16. Confidentiality is an important factor in conducting complaints investigations. ISVPS will always take into consideration any legislative requirements (for example, data protection legislation and policies on confidentiality and the use of complainant information). Complaints will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality and information released only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint. No third party will be told any more about the investigation than is strictly necessary in order to obtain the information required from them.

17. Where a complaint has been raised against a candidate or member of staff and has been upheld, the complainant will be advised of this. However, it would not be appropriate to share specific details affecting specific candidates or staff members, particularly where disciplinary action is taken.

Data security and records retention

18. Records of complaints will be retained in accordance with ISVPS's privacy policy which can be found at www.isvps.org.

19. For candidates where a dispute is ongoing or is in reasonable contemplation for which there is a statutory limitation period, the records relating to the issue in dispute will be kept for the relevant statutory limitation period

