



Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure

Fair resolution, independent review, external escalation and case registers

Document ID	Version	Owner	Approved by
SV-CAP-001	1.0	Raza Ali, Centre Manager	Raza Ali, Managing Director
Effective date	Review		Application
5 Aug 26	At least annually and after a material case or external change		All StepVisor students, applicants, programmes, services and delivery modes

Commitment: StepVisor welcomes concerns and will handle complaints and appeals fairly, promptly, accessibly and without retaliation, using independent decision-makers and clear reasons.

1 Purpose and scope

This policy explains how applicants, students and former students may complain about StepVisor services or appeal specified decisions. It applies generically across all awarding organisations, qualifications, courses, locations and face-to-face, online, workplace or blended delivery.

It covers actions or omissions by StepVisor staff and contractors within StepVisor's responsibility. Where another organisation controls the disputed matter, StepVisor will explain the correct route and cooperate appropriately.

- Resolve concerns at the earliest suitable level.
- Protect fair assessment and learner interests.
- Provide an impartial formal investigation and review.
- Make reasonable adjustments to the process.
- Keep accurate, confidential records and learn from outcomes.
- Meet applicable awarding-organisation and external escalation requirements.

2 Definitions and choosing the correct route

Route	Use for
Concern / informal resolution	A problem that may be resolved quickly through explanation, correction or agreed local action.
Service complaint	Dissatisfaction with teaching support, administration, communication, facilities, conduct, accessibility, fees, delivery or another service.
Assessment appeal	A challenge to an assessment decision or process on permitted grounds; not simply disagreement with academic judgement.
Admissions / enrolment review	A challenge to an application, eligibility, condition, refusal, transfer, withdrawal or registration decision.
Malpractice decision appeal	A challenge to a finding or sanction under the applicable malpractice procedure.
Data protection concern	A concern about personal-data handling; routed to the Data Protection Officer and rights process where applicable.
Safeguarding disclosure	A safety or welfare concern requiring immediate safeguarding action rather than ordinary complaint handling.
Whistleblowing	Disclosure of wrongdoing in the public interest, handled through the protected reporting route.

Routing rule: StepVisor will identify the substance rather than reject a case because the student used the wrong label. Mixed cases may use coordinated routes, with responsibilities and timescales explained.

3 Principles and student rights

- Be treated with dignity, impartiality and procedural fairness.
- Receive accessible information, reasonable adjustments and language/communication support where practicable.
- Be accompanied by a supporter at a meeting, subject to reasonable conduct and confidentiality rules.
- Know the case handler, issues being considered, expected timetable and outcome reasons.
- Provide evidence, respond to significant adverse information and identify a desired remedy.
- Have conflicts declared and the case reassigned where independence is compromised.
- Use the procedure without academic, service or personal retaliation.
- Receive information about the next internal and applicable external stage.

Students are expected to provide truthful information, preserve relevant evidence, communicate respectfully, maintain confidentiality and engage within reasonable deadlines. Genuine mistakes, distress or difficulty communicating will be handled sensitively.

4 Roles and independence

Role	Responsibilities
Managing Director / Centre Manager - Raza Ali	Owns the policy, appoints independent investigators/reviewers, approves remedies and ensures external notification where required.
Student Support Officer - Muhammad Umar	Receives and logs cases, helps students access the process, coordinates communication and monitors deadlines.
IOA - Farzana Nazir	Provides independent assessment-quality expertise and safeguards disputed assessment evidence; does not review her own prior action.
Tutor / Assessor - Muhammad Omar	Supports early resolution, supplies records and implements actions; does not decide a formal appeal against their own assessment.
Data Protection / Safeguarding Lead - Muhammad Umar	Advises on restricted information, rights, welfare and immediate protection.
Investigator / reviewer	Is competent and independent, defines issues, considers evidence fairly and gives reasoned findings.
All staff	Preserve evidence, cooperate, declare conflicts, avoid retaliation and implement authorised actions.

Independence and conflict of interest: No person may investigate or review a case where they made the disputed decision, are personally involved, were a material witness, have advised substantially on the merits or hold another unmanaged conflict.

5 Accessibility, support and representation

- Accept cases by email, form, letter, meeting record or another accessible method.
- Offer reasonable adjustments such as accessible formats, additional time, breaks, remote meetings or a communication supporter.
- Explain confidentiality and obtain authority before communicating with a representative.
- Allow anonymous information to be considered where possible, while explaining limits on investigation or personal remedy.
- Take additional care where the student is under 18, at risk, lacks capacity or discloses safeguarding concerns.
- Do not require a student to confront the person complained about or use mediation where unsafe or unsuitable.

Contact: Cases should be sent to info@stepvisor.com or raised with the Student Support Officer. Urgent safety concerns must be reported immediately through safeguarding or emergency routes.

6 Time limits and communication standards

Stage	Normal timeframe
Raise initial concern / formal complaint	As soon as possible and normally within 20 working days of the event or when the student reasonably became aware.
Assessment appeal	Normally within 10 working days of the formal decision or feedback, subject to any shorter external deadline.
Acknowledgement	Within 3 working days.
Formal outcome	Normally within 15 working days after sufficient information is available.
Internal review request	Within 10 working days of the formal outcome.
Internal review outcome	Normally within 15 working days.

These are service standards, not automatic grounds to reject a valid case. StepVisor may accept a late case for good reason, including disability, illness, safeguarding, delayed evidence or inability to understand the decision. If more time is needed, StepVisor explains why, gives a revised date and provides proportionate updates.

7 Early and informal resolution

1. Listen, clarify the concern and identify the outcome sought.
2. Check whether immediate correction, information, apology, support or practical action can resolve the matter.
3. Keep a proportionate record of the issue, response and agreement.
4. Confirm any action, owner and completion date in writing where material.
5. Escalate if unresolved, repeated, serious, unsafe, discriminatory, conflicted or likely to affect other students.
6. Do not use informal resolution to suppress a formal complaint or avoid reporting obligations.

Direct formal access: A student may proceed directly to the formal stage where informal resolution is inappropriate or has failed. Serious misconduct, safeguarding, fraud, discrimination or systemic risk is referred immediately to the relevant process.

8 Formal complaint procedure

7. Receive the complaint and provide help to identify the issues, evidence, people involved and desired outcome.
8. Log the case, acknowledge receipt and conduct an immediate risk, safeguarding, conflict, data and external-notification check.
9. Confirm the scope, case handler, applicable policies, information needed and expected date.
10. Secure relevant records, including original communications, systems, attendance, financial and quality records.
11. Invite a response from relevant person(s) and give the complainant an opportunity to address significant disputed facts.
12. Use interviews or a meeting only where useful; keep an agreed note and permit reasonable support.
13. Assess each allegation on the balance of probabilities unless another applicable rule requires a different standard.
14. Issue a written outcome identifying issues, evidence considered, findings, reasons, remedy/action and review route.
15. Track corrective actions to verified closure and consider wider students or systemic risk.

Possible findings

Finding	Meaning
Upheld	The complaint is substantiated in full.
Partly upheld	Some material elements are substantiated.
Not upheld	Available evidence does not substantiate the complaint.
Unable to determine	Evidence is insufficient or irreconcilable; risks and learning may still require action.
Resolved / withdrawn	An agreed resolution is reached or the student withdraws; StepVisor may continue where risk remains.

9 Assessment appeal grounds and exclusions

Permitted grounds

- Published assessment criteria, grading rules or procedures were applied incorrectly.
- A material procedural irregularity affected the decision.
- Relevant evidence submitted on time was overlooked or recorded incorrectly.
- An approved reasonable adjustment was not implemented, or access needs were not properly considered.
- Bias, discrimination or an unmanaged conflict may have affected the decision.
- There is material new evidence about the process that could not reasonably have been supplied earlier.
- The decision is inconsistent with applicable standardisation, IQA or awarding-organisation requirements.

Normally not grounds

- Disagreement with a properly exercised academic or professional judgement without evidence of error.
- A request to remark work merely to seek a higher outcome.
- Evidence created or improved after the assessment, unless a permitted reassessment route applies.
- Circumstances that should be considered through special consideration, unless the complaint concerns mishandling of that process.

Evidence preserved: The original submission, assessment decision, feedback, IQA record, adjustment and audit trail must be preserved. No result or certificate claim is changed while the appeal is unresolved unless an authorised risk control requires a hold.

10 Assessment appeal procedure

16. The student requests clarification from the assessor where appropriate; clarification is not a barrier to formal appeal.
17. The formal appeal identifies the decision, permitted ground, supporting evidence and requested outcome.
18. Student Support logs and acknowledges the appeal, checks deadlines and places any necessary result/claim hold.
19. An independent, competent reviewer is appointed; the original assessor and IQA provide records but do not determine the appeal.
20. The reviewer checks registration, task/version, criteria, evidence, decision rationale, feedback, adjustment, authenticity and IQA/standardisation.
21. The student may respond to significant new adverse information before the decision.
22. The reviewer issues a reasoned outcome: uphold, partly uphold, reject, remit for fresh assessment/review, or require another authorised remedy.
23. Records, results and claims are corrected through controlled processes; affected learners and wider sampling are considered.
24. The student is told the internal-review and applicable awarding-organisation route.

No automatic grade substitution: A procedural appeal reviewer should not award marks or competence they are not authorised and competent to determine. The usual remedy is independent reassessment, reconsideration or correction under the applicable rules.

11 Other student appeals and reviews

Decision	Review focus
Admissions / enrolment	Correct application of entry, eligibility, capacity, evidence, equality and reasonable-adjustment requirements.
Withdrawal / attendance	Accuracy of engagement evidence, communication, support, contract and safeguarding considerations.
Reasonable adjustment / special consideration	Authority, evidence, process, timing and protection of the required standard.
Malpractice finding / sanction	Procedural fairness, evidence, proportionality, conflict, new evidence and applicable rules.
Fees / refund	Published terms, information supplied, calculation, consumer/funding requirements and individual facts.
Certificate / result administration	Claim evidence, identity/data accuracy, reconciliation, delay and correction process.

The applicable specialist policy remains controlling. Student Support coordinates the correct route so the student is not required to duplicate the same case unnecessarily.

12 Internal review stage

A review is not automatically a full reinvestigation. It considers whether the first-stage decision was procedurally sound, reasonable on the evidence, independent and compliant, or whether material new evidence should be admitted.

- 25. The review request states the ground and desired remedy.
- 26. A senior, competent and unconflicted reviewer who was not involved at the earlier stage is appointed.
- 27. The reviewer receives the complete case file and may seek focused clarification.
- 28. The reviewer may confirm, vary or set aside the outcome; require reinvestigation/reassessment; or issue another authorised remedy.
- 29. The final internal outcome states reasons, action, completion arrangements and applicable external route.
- 30. StepVisor issues a completion letter or equivalent record where required.

13 External escalation

After the relevant internal process is complete, StepVisor will identify any applicable external route. This may include the awarding organisation for qualification or assessment matters, a funder or partner where it controls the decision, a data-protection or consumer body, or another statutory/contractual route.

- Provide current contact information, deadline and required completion evidence where known.
- Do not state that an awarding organisation can consider matters outside its remit.
- Cooperate with authorised external review and preserve the full case record.
- Implement binding decisions and consider recommendations, wider impact and preventive action.
- Notify an awarding organisation earlier where its rules require immediate reporting or the matter could cause an adverse effect.

Current rules: External bodies, eligibility and deadlines may change. StepVisor must check the current programme, contract and awarding-organisation rules when issuing a final outcome.

14 Evidence, meetings and decision standard

- Collect only relevant and proportionate evidence and preserve originals, metadata and version history.
- Give both sides a fair opportunity to identify evidence and respond to significant disputed facts.
- Use the balance of probabilities for factual complaint findings unless a binding rule states otherwise.
- Distinguish fact, inference, opinion and unresolved conflict in the outcome.
- Do not draw an adverse inference solely because a student needs support, communicates differently or cannot attend a meeting.
- Record meeting purpose, attendees, main points and agreed corrections; recordings require a lawful basis and clear notice.
- Refuse irrelevant, abusive or unlawfully obtained material where appropriate, explaining the effect on the case.

15 Remedies and corrective action

Remedy / action	Examples
Student-focused	Explanation, apology, correction, restored opportunity, reassessment, support, refund/recalculation, record or result correction where authorised.
Staff / service	Training, supervision, workload change, mediation, conduct referral, process or communication improvement.
Quality control	Expanded IQA sampling, standardisation, task review, claim hold, affected-learner review or external notification.
Systemic	Policy, contract, accessibility, technology, staffing, safeguarding, data or risk-control change.

A remedy must be lawful, proportionate, within authority and capable of implementation. The outcome names the action owner and due date. Student Support verifies completion; confidentiality may limit disclosure of personnel action, but the student is told whether their complaint led to action where possible.

16 Confidentiality, data protection and records

- Use a unique case reference and store case files in restricted approved systems.
- Share information only with people who need it to handle, review, protect or report the case.
- Explain that absolute confidentiality cannot be promised where fairness, safety or law requires disclosure.
- Minimise special-category, safeguarding and third-party information; redact where appropriate.
- Keep the complaint/appeal register free of unnecessary sensitive detail.
- Retain records under the applicable StepVisor, awarding-organisation and legal schedule and preserve active disputes or investigations.
- Report data loss, wrong-recipient communications or unauthorised access immediately.

17 Safeguarding, misconduct and overlapping procedures

Issue identified	Immediate handling
Risk of harm / safeguarding	Act under safeguarding procedures first; ordinary timescales may pause while protective action proceeds.
Suspected malpractice / fraud	Preserve evidence and refer under the Malpractice and Maladministration Policy.
Staff or student misconduct	Refer to the applicable conduct/disciplinary process with fair notice and separation of roles.
Discrimination / harassment	Provide support, assess immediate protection and investigate under the suitable complaint/conduct route.
Criminal allegation	Protect safety and evidence; seek appropriate advice and cooperate lawfully with authorities.
Legal proceedings / regulator contact	Preserve records and obtain authorised advice; do not obstruct the student's rights.

Parallel procedures are coordinated to avoid inconsistent decisions and repeated interviews. StepVisor tells the student what is proceeding, paused or restricted and why, subject to lawful confidentiality.

18 Unreasonable behaviour and repeated cases

A complaint is not unreasonable merely because it is persistent, strongly expressed, unsuccessful or difficult. Restrictions may be considered only where behaviour is abusive, threatening, discriminatory, knowingly false, excessively repetitive or places disproportionate demands after reasonable support and boundaries.

- Assess disability, distress, communication and safeguarding needs before restricting contact.
- Give a warning, explain the behaviour and set proportionate boundaries where safe.
- Use one contact person, agreed channel, meeting rules or frequency limits rather than ending access entirely.
- Have a senior unconflicted person approve, record and review any restriction.
- Continue to consider genuinely new evidence, urgent risk or a new matter.
- Restrictions do not prevent access to external or emergency routes.

19 Monitoring, reporting and learning

Indicator	Review evidence
Access	Cases by route, delivery mode and relevant equality characteristics where lawful; adjustment requests.
Timeliness	Acknowledgement, outcome, review and overdue-action times.
Outcomes	Upheld, partly upheld, not upheld, withdrawn and externally changed decisions.
Themes	Teaching, assessment, administration, conduct, fees, accessibility, data, safeguarding and systems.
Quality risk	Changed assessment decisions, expanded sampling, affected learners, claims held/corrected.
Recurrence	Repeat complaints, repeated staff/service issues and effectiveness of corrective actions.
Student experience	Clarity, support, communication and satisfaction with handling, separate from outcome.
External confidence	Awarding-organisation or other external findings and completed actions.

Student Support monitors open cases weekly. Raza Ali reviews overdue, serious and systemic matters monthly and anonymised trends quarterly. Farzana Nazir reviews assessment-related learning and sampling. The policy is reviewed annually and after material findings, legal or awarding-organisation change.

Appendix A Complaint / Appeal Submission Form

Submission field	Student record
Student/applicant name, ID and programme	
Contact details and preferred accessible format	
Representative / supporter authority	
Route requested: complaint / assessment appeal / other	
Decision, event or service complained about	
Date(s) and people involved	
Issues or permitted appeal grounds	
Steps already taken and outcome	
Evidence supplied / location	
Desired outcome	
Adjustment, safeguarding or urgent needs	
External deadline or linked case	
Declaration that information is accurate	
Signature / submission date	

Appendix B Case Assessment and Investigation Plan

Case field	Record
Case reference / received / acknowledged	
Route, scope and issues	
Time-limit decision / reason	
Immediate risk, safeguarding and support	
Conflict and independence check	
Investigator / reviewer / competence	
Policies, criteria and decision standard	
Evidence required / owners / dates	
People to respond / interview	
Data-sharing and confidentiality controls	
Result / claim / service hold	
External notification requirement	
Target outcome date / updates	
Findings by issue and evidence	
Remedy / action / owner / due	
Outcome sent / review deadline	
Closure and wider-learning check	

Appendix C Complaints and Appeals Register

Case / route	Received / ack.	Student / programme	Issue category	Handler / conflict	Outcome / date	Review / external	Actions / closed

Register rule: Use student IDs and category codes where possible. Detailed allegations, health, safeguarding, misconduct and evidence belong in the restricted case file, not the general register.

Appendix D Outcome and Internal Review Checklist

Control	Evidence / complete
Issues and jurisdiction confirmed	
Evidence list and response opportunity	
Independence / conflict recorded	
Finding for each issue / ground	
Decision standard and reasons	
Remedy / action / owner / due	
Affected-student / systemic review	
Result, record or claim correction	
Awarding-organisation notification	
Outcome accessibility and confidentiality	
Internal review ground / deadline	
External route / deadline / completion letter	
Action verification / final closure	

Appendix E Corrective Action and Learning Log

Case/theme	Finding / root cause	Affected scope	Immediate control	Action / owner / due	Evidence of completion	Effectiveness review	Closed / reported

Appendix F Implementation and Approval Checklist

Action	Owner	Evidence / complete
Publish accessible complaint and appeal routes, forms, contact details and timescales.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Map current awarding-organisation appeal, complaint and external escalation requirements.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Appoint trained independent investigators/reviewers and conflict cover.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Configure restricted case files, register access, retention and secure communication.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Implement result/claim holds and evidence-preservation controls for assessment appeals.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Train staff on routing, safeguarding, malpractice, data and no-retaliation duties.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Set acknowledgement, update, outcome and review monitoring.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Create completion-letter and external-referral controls.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Implement action verification, affected-student review and trend reporting.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	
Test the procedure using a complaint and an assessment-appeal scenario.	Raza Ali / Muhammad Umar	

Approval

Name / role	Signature	Date
Raza Ali, Managing Director / Centre Manager	<i>Raza Ali</i> _____	_5 Aug 26_____
Muhammad Umar, Student Support Officer	<i>Farzana Nazir</i> _____	_5 aug 26_____

Operational gate: Before publication, StepVisor must insert any programme-specific external routes and deadlines, confirm trained independent reviewers and test secure case handling and result/claim holds.