

Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedure

Policy owner:	Northern School of Contemporary Dance – Leadership Team
Policy Tier	1
Lead contact:	Admissions Manager, Head of Quality & Compliance
Audience:	Applicants for Northern School of Contemporary Dance Courses of higher education programmes, including franchise partner providers
Approving body:	Senate
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Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations	Annex A1 Academic Regulations & Credit Framework
Related Policies, Procedures and Guidance:	Admissions Policy, Student Protection Plan, Student Complaints Procedure
UK Quality Code reference:	Quality Code Expectations for Quality; Advice and Guidance: Concerns, Complaints and Appeals
OfS Conditions reference:	C Conditions (consumer protection law & Student Protection); B Conditions (Quality and standards, including admissions); E Conditions (Public interest governance, management and governance).
Equality and Diversity Considerations:	Universities UK / GuildHE Fair Admissions Code of Practice (October 2025); CMA guidance on consumer protection law for HE providers; OIA Good Practice Frameworks.
Further information: Queries should be directed to: admissions@nscd.ac.uk or quality.office@nscd.ac.uk <i>This document was produced with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting and editing purposes. All content has been reviewed, amended where necessary, and approved by NSCD.</i>	

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1. Purpose

This policy sets out how the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) will handle formal appeals against admissions decisions, and complaints about the admissions process, made by applicants to NSCD-registered programmes. It supports NSCD's obligations under consumer protection law, the regulatory expectations of the Office for Students (OfS), the Equality Act 2010, and the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. It is intended to be fair, accessible, transparent, and timely for all applicants.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all applicants to programmes offered by NSCD, including programmes delivered in whole or in part by an approved franchise partner provider where the applicant would, if successful, be registered as an NSCD student.

Where a complaint or appeal concerns the conduct or decision of a franchise partner provider, NSCD retains overall responsibility for ensuring that the matter is handled in accordance with this policy. NSCD will liaise with the franchise partner provider as necessary to investigate, and the final decision rests with NSCD. Applicants in these circumstances should not be directed to use the franchise partner's own internal complaints procedure for matters within the scope of this policy.

This policy does not apply to:

- complaints or appeals made by enrolled students (these are dealt with under NSCD's Student Complaints Procedure and Academic Appeals Procedure);
- challenges to the academic or non-academic judgement of selectors applying NSCD's published admissions criteria;
- matters that fall under another NSCD policy (for example, safeguarding, fitness to practise, or data subject access requests).

3. Definitions

Applicant: Any individual who has submitted an application, attended an audition or interview, or received an offer (conditional or unconditional) from NSCD or an NSCD franchise partner provider, and who is not yet enrolled as an NSCD student.

Admissions decision: Any formal decision made in the course of the admissions process, including (without limitation) rejection of an application, withdrawal or amendment of an offer, a decision on fee status, or a decision following a review of relevant criminal convictions.

Appeal: A request to **reconsider an admissions decision** on one or more of the grounds set out in this policy.

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction about the **conduct** of the admissions process (for example, inaccurate or misleading information, delay, discrimination, or failure to make reasonable adjustments).

Franchise partner provider: An organisation with which NSCD has a current and approved franchise or partnership agreement under which the partner delivers all or part of a programme leading to an NSCD award, and where the student would be registered as an NSCD student.

Working day: A day other than a Saturday, Sunday, bank holiday, or a day on which NSCD is officially closed.

Investigating Officer: The member of NSCD staff (or, where appropriate, a member of franchise partner staff acting under NSCD's direction) appointed to investigate a Stage 1 appeal or complaint.

Reviewer: The senior member of NSCD staff appointed to conduct a Stage 2 review.

4. General Principles

NSCD is committed to fairness, transparency, and procedural integrity in all aspects of the admissions process. We recognise that there will be occasions where an applicant may wish to lodge an appeal or complaint, and we are committed to ensuring that these are handled promptly, sensitively, and without detriment to the applicant.

No applicant will be treated less favourably as a result of lodging an appeal or complaint in good faith under this policy.

Reasonable adjustments will be made to the operation of this procedure for applicants with disabilities or other access needs, including (where appropriate) extending timescales, accepting submissions in alternative formats, or providing support to complete the form. Applicants should contact quality.office@nscd.ac.uk to request adjustments.

Where a single matter is raised by more than one applicant (for example, an issue affecting an entire audition cohort), NSCD reserves the right to handle the matters as a group complaint, while still providing each applicant with an individual outcome.

Where NSCD determines that an appeal or complaint has been made in bad faith, or is frivolous or vexatious, it reserves the right to terminate consideration of the matter. The decision to do so will be taken by the Vice Principal (or nominee), and the applicant will be informed in writing with reasons.

In operating this policy, NSCD may involve the Quality Office, or other senior staff for procedural advice and guidance. Where a conflict of interest arises, or specific expertise is required, a member of staff from outside the admissions function may handle the matter. No proceedings under this policy shall be invalidated by the involvement of such an officer.

5. Eligibility

Who can use this procedure

- Appeals and complaints should normally be submitted by the applicant in person.
- Submissions made by a third party (parent, guardian, advisor, representative) will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, such as where the applicant is a minor, where a reasonable

adjustment is required, or where the applicant has provided written authorisation for the third party to act on their behalf.

- Anonymous complaints will not normally be considered under this procedure.

Matters NSCD does not consider eligible

The following are not eligible grounds of complaint or appeal under this procedure:

- submissions which do not meet one of the published grounds set out in Sections 7 or 8 of this policy;
- challenges to the academic or artistic judgement of selectors operating within published criteria;
- appeals based purely on disagreement with the admissions decision;
- appeals based on the applicant's own failure to fulfil academic or non-academic admissions requirements;
- a matter relating to another applicant's outcome;
- submissions that are frivolous or vexatious, or made in bad faith. Examples include: submissions that are obsessive, harassing, or repetitive; insistence on pursuing matters already determined to be without merit; the pursuit of unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes; harassing, malicious or offensive communications; submissions intended to cause offence, disruption or annoyance; and unreasonable demands for redress.

6. Informal Stage

Many concerns can be resolved swiftly and amicably without recourse to the formal procedure.

Applicants are encouraged to raise concerns informally with NSCD as soon as possible after the matter arises, and in any event normally within 21 calendar days of the incident.

Informal queries should be directed to admissions@nscd.ac.uk. Where the application is to a franchise partner provider, the applicant may raise the matter informally with the partner provider in the first instance.

Matters raised informally do not constitute a Stage 1 submission and do not start the formal timescales. Where a matter is raised informally outside the 21-day window, NSCD will determine whether it has been raised within a reasonable timeframe and may decline to consider it where it has not.

7. Stage 1 — Formal Stage

Submitting a Stage 1 appeal or complaint

A Stage 1 appeal or complaint should be lodged within 21 working days of either the admissions decision or of the incident occurring. Applicants should complete the Admissions Appeal/Complaint Form, clearly mark it as a Stage 1 Complaint or Appeal (as relevant), and submit it by email to quality.office@nscd.ac.uk. Alternative submission formats (post, in person, or accessible electronic formats) are available on request.

Submissions received outside the 21 working-day window will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the Vice Principal or nominee, where the applicant can demonstrate to the School's satisfaction that there were valid reasons for the delay.

Acknowledgement and allocation

NSCD's Quality Office will acknowledge receipt of every Stage 1 submission within 5 working days, and will determine the most appropriate Investigating Officer to consider the matter, taking into account the nature of the case and any potential conflicts of interest. Where the matter concerns a franchise partner provider, the Quality Office will liaise with the partner to obtain relevant records and may appoint a partner officer as a co-investigator under NSCD's direction.

Grounds — Stage 1 Complaint (grounds focused on process and experience)

A Stage 1 complaint may be made on one or more of the following grounds:

Ref	Ground
1a	There is evidence of significant administrative or procedural error in the admissions process that caused detriment to the applicant.
1b	Information published by NSCD or its franchise partner provider was materially misleading, inaccurate, or incomplete, and this caused detriment to the applicant.
1c	NSCD or its franchise partner provider failed to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 during the application or selection process.
1d	There was unreasonable delay or failure to communicate during the admissions process, causing detriment to the applicant.

Grounds — Stage 1 Appeal (grounds focused on the decision)

A Stage 1 appeal may be made on one or more of the following grounds:

Ref	Ground
1a	There is evidence of significant administrative or procedural error in the admissions process that is likely to have affected the admissions decision.
1b	There is evidence of prejudice or bias in the selection decision.
1c	There is additional relevant information which, for valid reasons, was unable to be included in the original application and which warrants further consideration.
1d	The admissions decision was made in breach of published admissions criteria or policies.
1e	NSCD or its franchise partner provider failed to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 in a way that affected the admissions decision.

Investigation and outcome

The Investigating Officer will review the submission, gather any necessary evidence, including from a franchise partner provider where relevant, and determine whether the ground(s) of complaint or appeal are met. The Stage 1 Outcome Letter will be issued within 20 working days of acknowledgement of the submission. A copy will be retained by the Quality Office for record and statistical purposes.

Where the timescale cannot be met, for example, because further information is required, or the matter involves complex liaison with a franchise partner provider, the applicant will be kept informed in writing of the reason for the delay and the revised timescale.

8. Stage 2 — Request for Review

Submitting a Stage 2 request

Where an applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, they may submit a Stage 2 Request for Review within 10 working days of the date of the Stage 1 Outcome Letter.

The Stage 2 submission must include:

- a freshly completed Admissions Appeal/Complaint Form, clearly marked as Stage 2, and any reference number provided in the Stage 1 Outcome Letter;
- the original Stage 1 submission;
- the Stage 1 Outcome Letter;
- any new evidence or submissions the applicant wishes to be considered.

Submissions should be sent to quality.office@nscd.ac.uk

Grounds — Stage 2 (Complaint or Appeal)

The grounds at Stage 2 are the same regardless of whether the original submission was a complaint or an appeal. A Stage 2 request may be made on one or more of the following grounds:

Ref	Ground
2a	There is evidence of significant administrative or procedural error in the handling of the Stage 1 submission.
2b	There is evidence of prejudice or bias in the handling of the Stage 1 submission.
2c	There is additional relevant information which, for valid reasons, was unable to be included previously, and which warrants reconsideration of the original decision.
2d	The Stage 1 Outcome was unreasonable in light of the evidence considered.

Independent review

The Stage 2 review will be conducted by the Vice Principal. Where the Vice Principal has had prior involvement in the case, a senior officer of equivalent standing, nominated by the NSCD CEO/Principal, will conduct the review. The Reviewer will not have been involved in the original admissions decision or in the Stage 1 investigation.

The Reviewer will consider the full submission, including any additional evidence, and will determine whether one or more Stage 2 grounds are met and, if so, the appropriate outcome.

Stage 2 Final Outcome Letter

A Stage 2 Final Outcome Letter will be issued within 20 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 submission. This letter represents NSCD's final decision on the matter and concludes the internal procedure. A copy will be issued to the CEO/Principal, the Quality Office and where relevant, the franchise partner provider.

9. Outcomes

Applicants are asked to set out their desired outcome on the submission form. Where an appeal or complaint is upheld, the Investigating Officer or Reviewer will determine the most appropriate remedy, taking the applicant's preferences into account. The remedy will not necessarily match the applicant's stated preference.

Examples include:

- a formal apology;
- a fresh audition, without prejudice, in the current round (where practicable) or in a subsequent year, including moving the applicant to a later stage of the audition process;
- a conditional offer of a place, subject to meeting any specified conditions within a defined timeframe;
- reconsideration of an admissions decision;
- refund of the application fee in exceptional circumstances;
- a recommendation to amend NSCD or franchise partner provider processes to prevent recurrence.

Where an offer of a place is made as a remedy, this is subject to NSCD's normal requirements and will be offered at the next available opportunity, which may not be within the academic year of the original application.

There may be circumstances in which an applicant meets the grounds for a complaint or appeal to be upheld but NSCD is not satisfied that the applicant is suitable for admission. In such cases, an alternative remedy will be considered, which may include a refund of the application fee. The reasons for this decision will be set out in the Stage 2 Final Outcome Letter.

10. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All submissions under this policy will be treated confidentially. Information will be shared only with those who need to be involved in considering and resolving the matter, which may include NSCD staff, franchise partner provider staff and where appropriate, external advisors with relevant expertise.

Personal data will be processed in accordance with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018, and NSCD's Privacy Notice. Where a complaint or appeal concerns a franchise partner provider, the applicant's data will, with their consent, where appropriate, and in accordance with the partnership agreement, be shared with the partner for the purpose of investigation.

Records of Stage 1 and Stage 2 submissions will be retained in accordance with NSCD's Data Retention Schedule. Anonymised statistical data, broken down by NSCD-delivered and franchise-delivered provision, will be reported to NSCD's Senate and the Board of Governors.

11. External Routes of Redress

Once the Stage 2 Final Outcome Letter has been issued, NSCD's internal procedure is exhausted. Applicants should be aware that the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) does not adjudicate admissions matters for applicants who are not yet enrolled.

Applicants may, however, wish to consider the following external routes, as relevant:

- the Office for Students (OfS) — for matters that may indicate a breach of a registered provider's conditions of registration, via the OfS notifications scheme;
- the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) — for concerns relating to data protection;
- the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) — for concerns relating to discrimination under the Equality Act 2010;
- the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) — for consumer protection concerns;
- Citizens Advice — for general advice on legal avenues available;
- the courts — as the ultimate route of redress.

12. Monitoring, Review and Version Control

This policy is owned by the Quality Office and is subject to a full review every three years. An annual light-touch review will be undertaken ahead of each admissions cycle to ensure that the policy remains aligned with current regulatory guidance and good practice. Interim reviews will be carried out whenever there is a material change in legislation, regulatory guidance, sector practice, or NSCD's own provision, including changes to franchise partnership arrangements.

Appendix A: Summary of Timescales

Stage	Timescale (working days, unless stated)
Informal query raised	Normally within 21 calendar days of the incident
Stage 1 submission lodged	Within 21 working days of the admissions decision or incident
Acknowledgement of Stage 1 submission	Within 5 working days
Stage 1 Outcome Letter issued	Within 20 working days of acknowledgement
Stage 2 Request for Review lodged	Within 10 working days of the Stage 1 Outcome Letter
Stage 2 Final Outcome Letter issued	Within 20 working days of receipt of Stage 2 submission