

**ARIES Policy Document**

**Policy: DTP Complaints**

**Reference: [UKRI TGC 2.12](#)**

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## **1. Scope and General Principles**

- 1.1. ARIES is firmly committed to nurturing the next generation of researchers and leaders equipped to address complex and pressing global challenges. We strive to provide an inclusive, supportive, and intellectually stimulating research and educational environment, alongside a high standard of service to our students, supervisors, and stakeholders. In line with this commitment, ARIES ensures that any individual, whether student, supervisor, or stakeholder, who wishes to raise a concern or lodge a complaint regarding decisions or actions taken by the programme can do so without fear of reprisal. All concerns will be handled with fairness, transparency, and due diligence, ensuring equitable treatment and appropriate resolution.
- 1.2. This policy sets out how complaints related to matters decided and managed by ARIES will be dealt with.
- 1.3. ARIES expects that students and supervisors will not engage in frivolous or vexatious complaints. It should be noted that if a complaint is found to have been brought with mischievous or vexatious intent it will not be considered and this may provide grounds to raise a formal concern with the individual's University of Registration/Institute.
- 1.4. ARIES operates a zero tolerance policy to bullying and harassment. In dealing with a complaint, should ARIES experience behaviour which could reasonably be considered to be unacceptable, including any abusive, intimidating and/or threatening behaviour or comments, the ARIES Manager may, in consultation with the Director, decide to cease correspondence with the Complainant whilst the complaint is being investigated and considered. Under these circumstances, the ARIES Manager will write to the Complainant to explain the reasons for this and confirm how the findings and outcome will be communicated. The ARIES Manager may also report concerns to the individual's University of Registration/Institute.

## **2. Applicants to ARIES**

- 2.1. If an applicant is dissatisfied with the way in which their application for a studentship was dealt with, this procedure provides guidance on how to raise a complaint and/or appeal a funding decision. It only applies to those individuals whose applications were submitted to ARIES for consideration of an ARIES funded studentship.
- 2.2. Separate procedures will exist for appeals or complaints relating to admissions decisions at the University of Registration. Where an applicant was not nominated to the ARIES-level studentship decision process, any appeal or complaint relating to the handling of their application must be directed to the University through which they applied for funding. Applicants should note that there is no right of appeal or complaint over matters of academic judgement or where the decision relates to a

failure on the part of the candidate to fulfil the minimum academic and/or non-academic requirements.

### 3. Current Holders of an ARIES Studentship

- 3.1. Current holders of an ARIES studentship who are dissatisfied with: (a) the way in which their application for additional ARIES funding has been dealt with by ARIES, (b) any service offered by ARIES, or (c) the actions or behaviour of a member of ARIES staff this procedure provides guidance on how to raise a complaint and/or appeal a funding decision.
- 3.2. The policy and procedures outlined in this document do not replace, supersede or substitute the complaints, appeals and/or grievance procedures that operate at our Partner Institutes where they relate to the student's registration and programme of study, including issues around supervision, institutional resources, and the consideration of pauses to or suspensions of study and progression - these matters must be directed to the University of Registration. Nor do they replace, supersede or substitute the complaints, appeals and/or grievance procedures relating directly to the standard of service or activities of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and/or the individual Research Councils. The table provided in Annex 1 outlines what is within and without the scope of ARIES complaints.

### 4. Definitions

- 4.1. A **complaint** is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction around the standard of service, decisions, behaviours, action, or lack thereof on behalf of ARIES. If the dissatisfaction relates to the Complainant's University of Registration, they should use that university's policy and process to resolve the matter (see point 1.6. above).
- 4.2. The **Complainant** is the person making the complaint.
- 4.3. For the purposes of this policy, unless otherwise stated, the **DTP** is defined as members of the ARIES core team, members of a ARIES governance structure when acting directly in the capacity of the DTP, e.g., Management/Strategy Board members, Academic Leads, Operational Leads, Finance Leads, Training & Development Leads, members of the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity Group, Student Representatives, and other members of ARIES Partner Institutes where they are acting in an official capacity in relation to ARIES, such as providing mandatory ARIES training.
- 4.4. **Academic Judgement:** There is no right of complaint over matters of academic judgement. Where a complaint is received that is assessed to be a matter of academic judgement the complaint will be rejected; however, the Complainant reserves the right to challenge this decision if they can provide appropriate evidence to support their complaint.

- 4.5. **DTP Policy:** There is normally no right of complaint over ARIES policies and procedures which have been executed following Management/Strategy Board approval unless the Complainant can provide compelling evidence that the policy/procedure should be given further consideration by ARIES.

## 5. Approach

- 5.1. ARIES will aim to consider and propose informal resolution to any potential complaint in the first instance, adapting an open, engaged and inclusive approach to minimise any possible distress and inconvenience.
- 5.2. When considering all complaints raised either informally or formally, ARIES will ensure that all reasonable efforts are made to avoid any possible or perceived conflict of interest or prejudice and/or bias when cases are considered. The ARIES Director is responsible and accountable for ensuring such integrity and they have discretion to seek advice and support from academic and/or professional service colleagues of the DTP's Partner Institutes.
- 5.3. All parties involved in the complaint are required to respect ARIES policies and procedures, and act fairly and courteously towards each other. In this spirit, those complaining should try to resolve the situation amicably before resorting to a formal complaint. If this is not possible or is unsuccessful, the Complainant may lodge a formal complaint under this policy.
- 5.4. Complainants must raise matters in a timely manner and within three months of the incident/decision you are complaining about. The ARIES Director has the discretion to consider informal or formal complaints that are received after three months should this be considered appropriate in the specific circumstances.
- 5.5. The DTP will not respond to anonymous complaints. However, where there is sufficient and credible evidence of a recurring and/or serious incident, the DTP Manager may submit the complaint to the DTP Director for advice, unless the complaint concerns the DTP Manager or Director, in which case the matter may be referred to the Head of Doctoral Training Partnerships at the University of East Anglia (see section 7). The Complainant may ask a representative to act on their behalf however the DTP will need written confirmation of this (via email) and who the representative will be (see point 6.2.3. below).
- 5.6. Complaints can only be submitted on an individual basis; however, should the DTP Director or Manager find that several complaints relating to the same matter have been lodged by multiple individuals, they may consider such complaints on a group basis, subject to maintaining confidentiality.
- 5.7. Complaints will be accepted on one or more of the following grounds:

- a. **Procedural irregularity**, where there is a belief that the DTP has not adhered to its published guidance for awarding DTP funding and/or published DTP policy and/or procedure was not followed.
  - b. A **material administrative error**, occurred which impacted considerably the applicant or student's application for DTP funding or the student's DTP training pathway, e.g., extenuating circumstances or Reasonable Adjustments were not taken into account and of which ARIES was aware.
  - c. There is evidence of **prejudice and/or bias** in DTP policy and decision making - specific examples with supporting documentation must be provided to evidence this.
  - d. There is evidence of **inappropriate conduct or the unreasonable behaviour** by a representative of the DTP where they were acting in an official capacity in relation to the DTP and which is a direct contravention of UKRI Standard Terms and Conditions of Training Grant\*
- 5.8. Where a complaint concerns a matter(s) determined by the UKRI Standard Terms and Conditions of Training Grants, or to the DTP's funding and operations, the DTP will liaise with UKRI as to how the complaint should be handled and whether the Complainant should be directed to raise their case directly with the UKRI.

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*\*NOTE: Concerns relating to staff conduct and behaviour, such as bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct, should normally be reported to the individual's place of employment. If the individual's employer is unclear or unknown, the DTP Administrator can advise. There may be instances where the DTP's responsibility to applicants, studentship-holders, stakeholders and sponsors will require it to take action where an incident/behaviour occurs which could bring the DTP or sponsor into disrepute, or which could materially impact a DTP project and/or studentship and/or partnership, or which could result in UKRI sanctions against the DTP, or where it is not practical or reasonable for the matter to be raised with the individual's employer (e.g., an external training facilitator engaged by the DTP). In that case the DTP should be notified so that appropriate action may be taken if required.*

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## 6. Procedure

### 6.1. Resolving a Complaint Informally

6.1.1. Complainants should, wherever possible, try to resolve a concern informally and amicably at the earliest stage. This will not prejudice the DTP's consideration of a later formal Stage 1 Complaint submission.

6.1.2. If a Complainant is unable or unwilling to resolve their complaint informally, they may submit a Stage 1 Formal Complaint.

### 6.2. Stage 1 – Formal Complaint

6.2.1. Complaints must be submitted to the DTP Manager at [aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk](mailto:aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk) using the DTP Stage 1 Formal Complaint Form within the timescales outlined under 5.4 above.

- 6.2.2. The Complainant should provide the following in their formal submission:
- a. The nature of complaint
  - b. Any steps taken to informally resolve the problem / issue
  - c. The grounds for the complaint
  - d. The impact of the problem / issue
  - e. The proposed outcome the Complainant is seeking
  - f. Any evidence relating to the problem / issue, redacted as appropriate (e.g., if the complaint relates to an incident where other individuals were present and who do not wish to be named in a complaint)
- 6.2.3. If the Complainant does not feel comfortable complaining directly to the DTP Manager, they may act through a representative, for example, a staff member from their University of Registration/Host Institution. In this instance, the representative is asked to ensure the DTP Stage 1 Formal Complaint form is completed, that the Complainant is content with the substance, and that the form is submitted to the DTP Manager within the timescales outlined under point 5.4. above.
- 6.2.4. The DTP Manager or their deputy will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing via email within five working days of the DTP's receipt of the complaint.
- 6.2.5. The DTP Manager or their deputy will make an initial assessment as to whether the complaint falls within the scope of this policy (see Annex 1). If the complaint falls under the remit of the Complainant's University of Registration/Host Institution, the DTP Manager/deputy will advise the Complainant within five working days that they should follow that institution's policy and process to resolve the matter and no further action will be taken by the DTP.
- 6.2.6. Where the complaint is assessed to fall within the scope of this policy, the DTP Manager/deputy will conduct an initial investigation to assess the grounds for complaint in consultation with the DTP Director. If the complaint does not satisfy the grounds e.g., in the case of an academic judgement, the DTP Manager/deputy will reject the complaint and advise the Complainant within 10 working days from the date the complaint was initially acknowledged.
- 6.2.7. Where the grounds for complaint have been met, the DTP Manager/deputy will conduct an initial investigation, considering the evidence submitted in support of the case. In investigating the complaint, the DTP Manager/deputy can use their discretion to:
- a. contact and share details of the complaint with the person against whom the complaint has been lodged to obtain their perspective of the matter; and/or
  - b. contact and share details of the complaint with any other persons named in the complaint to obtain their perspective of the matter; and/or

- c. contact and share details of the complaint with the Complainant's University of Registration/Host Institution if considered necessary and appropriate in conducting the investigations; and or
  - d. seek additional information from the Complainant.
  
- 6.2.8. The DTP Manager/deputy will keep the Complainant informed of the process and timeline for the investigation, noting that, if the case is complex or received during a particularly busy period in the DTP calendar, it may take additional time to conclude. The Complainant will be notified of any potential delays.
  
- 6.2.9. The DTP Manager/deputy will prepare a written report outlining their investigation and proposed outcome to the DTP Director for their consideration and decision. If the Director concurs with the proposed outcome, the DTP Manager/deputy will confirm the outcome to the Complainant in writing via email.
  
- 6.2.10. The following are potential outcomes following the conclusion of the investigation:
  - a. Upheld
  - b. Rejected
  
- 6.2.11. Where a complaint is upheld, the letter will confirm the recommended actions to remedy the matter.
  
- 6.2.12. The DTP will aim to conclude the complaint within 20 working days from the date the complaint was initially acknowledged, subject to the conditions outlined in 6.2.8. above.
  
- 6.2.13. A record of all complaints made and the outcomes of each will be maintained by the DTP Manager in accordance with the DTP's [records retention policy](#).
  
- 6.3. Stage 2 – Review of Stage 1 Outcome**
- 6.3.1. A request to review the Stage 1 Complaint will only be considered where the Complainant can demonstrate that there was a procedural irregularity in the investigation and/or outcome of the Stage 1 Formal Complaint. Any evidence which was not submitted at the time of the original complaint will not be considered
  
- 6.3.2. A request to review the Stage 1 decision should be submitted to the DTP Manager at [aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk](mailto:aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk) using the DTP Stage 2 Review Request Form within 20 working days from the date the Stage 1 outcome letter was sent. The DTP Manager or their deputy will acknowledge receipt in writing via email within five working days of the DTP's receipt of the formal review request. The DTP Manager will identify an academic member of the DTP Management/Strategy Board (a "Reviewer") to consider the case.

- 6.3.3. The Reviewer will consider the original investigation and complaint outcome, alongside any supporting documentation submitted as evidence of the procedural irregularity.
- 6.3.4. The following are potential outcomes following the conclusion of the investigation:
- a. Upheld
  - b. Rejected
- 6.3.5. Where the Reviewer considers there is sufficient evidence to uphold the complaint, they will write to the DTP Manager and Director to confirm their decision and their proposed remedial action. The Reviewer has discretion to seek advice and support from academic and/or professional service colleagues of the DTP's Partner Institutes to make a final judgement.
- 6.3.6. The DTP Manager/deputy will aim to confirm the outcome to the Complainant in writing via email within 20 working days of acknowledgement of the formal review request. The Reviewer's decision will be final.

## **7. Complaints against members of the core DTP team**

- 7.1.1. If a complaint relates to a member of the core DTP team i.e., the DTP Director and/or DTP Manager and/or DTP Administrator, the complaint should be submitted to the University of East Anglia's Head of Doctoral Training Partnerships, Mrs Michelle Eastman ([m.eastman@uea.ac.uk](mailto:m.eastman@uea.ac.uk)) who may seek advice from the Associate Director Postgraduate Research as to the appropriate action to take.

## **8. Complaints relating to bullying and harassment**

- 8.1.1. In accordance with TGC 3.6, the DTP will be required to report to UKRI any upheld allegations of sexual exploitation, abuse, bullying, psychological abuse, physical violence and harassment, including in respect of any of the protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010, against staff, Students or associated personnel directly involved in a UKRI funded activity.

## **9. Information Sharing**

- 9.1.1. The DTP may share information about the complaint with other individuals/organisations where this is considered appropriate to resolving the matter(s) raised by the Complainant.
- 9.1.2. The DTP will take all reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality in accordance with the DTP privacy notice.

## 10. General Notices

10.1. **Variations.** This policy may be subject to amendment in the future, for example to reflect developments in relevant legislation or related policy/operational changes within the DTP. Any changes or updates which have a material impact on DTP students and/or supervisors will be notified to students and/or supervisors (as applicable) in advance and may be subject to appropriate consultation. It is expected that this policy will be reviewed not less than every 5 years.

10.2. In this document, the following verbal forms are used:

- “shall” and “must” indicate a requirement;
- “should” indicates a recommendation;
- “may” indicates a permission;
- “can” indicates a possibility or a capability

### Version Control

Version	Date	Note
1.0	03.06.2026	

**ANNEX 1: DTP STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS FORM**

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Date Completed:</b>	
<b>Are you submitting this complaint yourself or as the Representative on behalf of the Complainant</b>	As the Complainant / As the Representative of the Complainant <i>[delete as appropriate]</i>
<b>If you are submitting this complaint on behalf of the Complainant please confirm that they have agreed to the substance and content of the complaint</b>	
<b>Contact email:</b>	

<b>What is the nature of the complaint?</b> <i>(Include dates/period when the problem/incident occurred and if there were any witnesses. Please only include names if the individual(s) have given you their explicit consent to do so.)</i>	
<b>Have you taken any steps to informally resolve the problem/incident?</b>	Yes / No <i>[delete as appropriate]</i>
If yes, provide details and the outcome:	
<b>How have you been impacted by the problem/incident?</b>	
<b>Please provide an explanation if you are submitting your complaint more than three months after the problem/incident occurred.</b> <i>(Complaints received more than three months after the problem/incident occurred will be considered at the discretion of the DTP Director.)</i>	

<b>What is the outcome you are seeking?</b>	
<b>On what grounds are you making your complaint – select all that apply (refer to section 5 of the DTP Complaints Policy):</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Procedural irregularity <input type="checkbox"/> Significant material administrative error <input type="checkbox"/> Prejudice and/or bias <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate conduct or unreasonable behaviour by a representative of the DTP acting in an official capacity of the DTP	
<b>Is there any additional information of which we should be aware?</b>	Yes / No <i>[delete as appropriate]</i>
If yes, please provide further information:	
<p>Please submit this form to the DTP Manager at <a href="mailto:aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk">aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk</a></p> <p>Where the complaint relates to a member of core DTP staff, please submit this form to Michelle Eastman, Head of Doctoral Training Partnerships at <a href="mailto:m.eastman@uea.ac.uk">m.eastman@uea.ac.uk</a></p>	

<b>DTP OFFICE USE ONLY</b>	
Date Received:	
Complaint Reference Number:	

**ANNEX 2: DTP STAGE 2 REVIEW OF STAGE 1 REQUEST FORM**

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Date Completed:</b>	
<b>Date of Complaint outcome against which you are appealing:</b>	
<b>Are you submitting this appeal yourself or as the Representative on behalf of the Complainant</b>	As the Complainant / As the Representative of the Complainant <i>[delete as appropriate]</i>
<b>If you are submitting this appeal on behalf of the Appellant please confirm that they have agreed to the substance and content of the appeal</b>	
<b>Contact email:</b>	

**What are your grounds for appeal?** *(An appeal will only be considered where you can demonstrate that there was a procedural irregularity in the investigation and/or outcome of the Stage 1 Formal Complaint. New or additional evidence not made available in the original complaint will not be considered.)*

Please submit this form to the DTP Manager at [aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk](mailto:aries.dtp@uea.ac.uk)

Where the complaint related to a member of core DTP staff, please submit this form to Michelle Eastman, Head of Doctoral Training Partnerships at [m.eastman@uea.ac.uk](mailto:m.eastman@uea.ac.uk)

**DTP OFFICE USE ONLY**

Date Received:	
Review Reference Number:	
Related Complaint Reference Number:	

### ANNEX 3: What is within and without the scope of DTP complaints

\*UoR = University of Registration

Domain	In Scope – Covered by DTP Complaints Policy	Out of Scope – Covered by UoR* Policies & Procedures	Not normally within scope of either the DTP or UoR Policies & Procedures
<b>Pre-Award</b>			
<b>Admissions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decisions to not fund a studentship which are</li> <li>- The conduct of DTP staff and/or supervisors and/or Interview Panel Members relating to a candidate’s application for a DTP studentship prior to and during an interview.</li> <li>- The conduct of DTP staff and/or supervisors following the offer of a DTP studentship prior to formal University registration.</li> <li>- The DTP’s failure to put in place Reasonable Adjustments requested by the candidate to facilitate their application and/or interview for a DTP studentship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Admissions decisions relating to the academic eligibility of candidates.</li> <li>- Academic decisions relating to the shortlisting of candidates for formal DTP interview.</li> <li>- Academic decisions relating to the candidate’s performance at interview.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appeals and Complaints will not normally be considered where they relate to academic judgement or where the DTP/UoR’s decision relates to a failure on the part of the candidate to fulfil the DTP/UoR’s academic and/or non-academic requirements</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Award</b>			
<b>Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decisions relating to the withdrawal of DTP studentship funding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UoR decisions to charge students a continuation fee for late submission where the late submission was not supported by a DTP funded extension.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The funding of DTP projects relies on available funding from the Grant. As such the DTP Management and/or Strategy Board may need to take strategic decisions relating to the approval of projects for funding. There will not</li> </ul>

			normally be recourse to complain against such decisions.
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inappropriate conduct or unreasonable behaviour by a DTP supervisor which contravenes UKRI T&amp;Cs, including unreasonable expectations of working hours, inflexibility relating to reasonable adjustments, caring responsibilities and/or health conditions, and failure to permit students to take their minimum annual leave entitlement. *</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor supervision</li> <li>- Impacts due to a supervisor leaving the UoR/Host institution.</li> </ul>	
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Failure by the DTP to provide training in accordance with the mandatory DTP training pathway or to seek alternative options where previously advertised training is no longer available.</li> <li>- Inappropriate conduct by a training facilitator acting on behalf of the DTP. *</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Matters relating to the standard Faculty/Institute-led PhD training provision.</li> </ul>	
Academic Progression including fitness to study		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decisions to intermit/transfer/withdraw a student due to poor academic progression, engagement or fitness to study.</li> <li>- Viva outcomes leading to no award or the award of a lower degree (MPhil or MScR)</li> </ul>	
Institutional Resources		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of or breakdown of lab equipment and/or facilities required by the student to conduct their research.</li> <li>- Lack of or inability to access student support services.</li> </ul>	

Staff Conduct	- Inappropriate conduct or unreasonable behaviour of core staff acting in the capacity of the DTP.*	- Inappropriate conduct of UoR/Host Institution staff including bullying and harassment.	
<p><b>* Important Note:</b> Concerns relating to the conduct and behaviour of supervisors or DTP staff should normally be reported to the individual’s place of employment. Where an incident/behaviour occurs which could bring the DTP or sponsor into disrepute, or which could materially impact a DTP project and/or studentship and/or partnership, or which could result in UKRI sanctions against the DTP, or where it is not practical or reasonable for the matter to be raised with the individual’s employer (e.g., an external training facilitator) then the DTP should be notified so that appropriate action can be taken if required.</p>			
<p><b>UKRI / Research Councils</b></p>			
<p>You should use this procedure if you want to make a complaint about the standard of service or activities at UKRI and/or individual Research Councils:  <a href="https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/">https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/</a></p>			