Quality Assurance Unit: Raising Concerns Guidance

The role of the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) is to ensure high standards and good practice within the teaching, learning and assessment processes for University College London Medical School’s (UCLMS) undergraduate programme. Within the QAU’s remit is the management of the raising concerns process: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/medical-school/quality/raising-student-concerns.

Raising Concerns

A raising concern is a formal expression of grievance or dissatisfaction by a UCLMS student, pertaining to a problem encountered in the context of their degree. Typically these concerns are about individuals; doctors, other healthcare professionals, administrators and tutors.

Raising concerns are submitted online. The QAU assesses their severity and assigns a level of seriousness according to the nature of the concern. For example, an incident involving patient/student safety or a breach of legal, ethical and professional standards will be deemed to be very serious. Abuse of any nature, inclusive but not limited to verbal, psychological, physical and sexual abuse, will not be tolerated and will be treated as a serious breach of professional and ethical standards.

Concerns are prioritised based on risk. Serious concerns will be given high priority and, where patient/student safety is involved, the QAU will contact the relevant NHS site as a matter of urgency to ensure the source of the concern is immediately removed.

The majority of raising concerns are submitted by students in clinical years 4-6 and are of a serious nature. Concerns are now tabulated by site in the QAU’s formal feedback reports.

Please note that a concern raised about another student will be referred to the student support team for action. Similarly, a concern raised by a student about a GP placement will be referred to the undergraduate lead for primary care.

Raising Concerns process

After a student has submitted a raising concern via the online portal, it is logged by the QAU. The concern is treated as confidential and is only accessible to members of the QAU.

A member of the QAU team will arrange to meet with the student(s) who has raised the concern in order to discuss the matter further. This meeting is arranged to be supportive of the student(s) and allows them to be involved in the process; it is also an opportunity for the student(s) to provide additional information that was missing from the submitted report.

Anonymous raising concerns: If a student submits a raising concern anonymously, it is UCLMS’ local policy, in accordance with the UCL student complaints process, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/sites/academic-manual/files/section_10_student_complaints_procedure_august_2017.pdf, that the QAU cannot usually investigate it further. However, the report will be kept on file in case any concerns of a similar matter are raised in the future.
Guidance about the raising concerns process

I have been named in a raising concern – what happens next?

- If a concern is raised about you or your team, you will be contacted by the undergraduate site or QAU lead.
- The undergraduate site leads are typically responsible for relaying the information contained within the raising concern. However, the undergraduate site lead may devolve this responsibility to the academic lead for QA.
- It is recommended that a face to face meeting occurs to facilitate a discussion about the concern. You will be given the unredacted raising concern to review - typically at the meeting but you can have it in advance if you request it.
- If you have any comments or questions about the concern, please discuss with the site lead as they will be able to support you or refer your questions to the QAU. You are encouraged to exercise your right to respond to the concern and the site lead will feed this information back to the QAU.
- An appropriate response is dependent on the nature and significance of the raising concern. It is helpful to provide your explanation of events, but also to acknowledge the student’s perception of events too. Please discuss what an appropriate response is with the undergraduate site/QAU lead should you have any queries. However, in common with all complaints we expect a professional response, which would include acknowledgement of the concern, an evaluation of why it occurred and your personal reflections.
- You should not contact the students yourself or get feedback from other students.
- UCLMS requires all raising concerns to be included in your appraisal portfolio (academic and NHS) and these should be discussed at your next appraisal.
- If the concern is of a serious or recurring nature, the QAU reserves the right to escalate the complaint: this may involve your Trust, Responsible Officer or academic line manager at UCL.

A one-off raising concern will be closed on receipt of an appropriate professional response. The QAU will monitor the situation through the SEQs and communicate to the student that the matter has been resolved.

Guidance for Undergraduate Site Leads

What is the role of the site lead?\(^1\)

There are three main duties of the site lead:

a) To relay the raising concern to the relevant individual(s)
b) To guide the individual(s) to take reasonable actions demonstrating a reflective and proportionate response
c) To communicate with the QAU regarding the outcome of the raising concern

a) Relaying the raising concern to the relevant individual(s)

The site leads are responsible for relaying the information contained within the raising concern to the individual(s) concerned; as this can be a sensitive matter, it is recommended that the site lead meet with the individual face to face. Please share the full verbatim complaint with the person/s involved. A face to face meeting will give the site lead an opportunity to discuss the matter fully and support the individual(s) involved.

b) Guide the individual(s) to take reasonable actions demonstrating a reflective and honest response

There are a range of responses and actions that should be taken, depending on the nature and the significance of the concern. UCLMS requires all raising concerns to be included in a doctor’s portfolio and discussed at their appraisal.

---

\(^1\) In the instance of the undergraduate site lead being subject to a raising concern, this role will be undertaken by the Director of UCL Medical School
The undergraduate site lead may delegate the responsibility of liaisoning with the individual(s) concerned to the relevant module lead, providing they are confident to discuss the matter with the individual(s). It is the duty of the undergraduate site lead to ensure that the module lead is confident and able to do so. The feasibility of this is highly dependent on the module lead and their relationship with the individual(s) concerned.

Undergraduate site leads may defer the discussion to the academic lead for QAU in certain circumstances and by agreement.

c) Communication with the QAU regarding the outcome of the raising concern

Communication with the QAU will help to resolve the raising concern in a timely manner. This can be done through the site lead, but equally a response from the individual or team is welcomed. Once resolved, the QAU will close the case and monitor the situation through the SEQs. The QAU will then communicate to the student that the matter has been resolved.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1) Can the individual, who is subject to a raising concern meet with the student who has raised it?

No. It is vital that the anonymity of students is maintained so they do not experience detriment as a result of reporting a concern. Students rely on the QAU to maintain their confidentiality as far as possible, during the raising concerns process.

2) How does the site lead or individual know if the remedial action taken is sufficient and appropriate?

Every concern is different and each case should be treated individually. The individual(s) should demonstrate reflective behaviour by taking proactive steps to resolve the situation and to address any issues that prompted the student to submit the raising concern. The QAU can support and advise if the response is appropriate or if further action is needed.

3) Is it compulsory for doctors to discuss the raising concern in their appraisal?

Yes. Doctors should record compliments and complaints in their portfolio. See the GMC’s guidance: https://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/revalidation/revalidation_information.asp

4) What should be done in the situation where the individual disagrees with the student’s version of events?

You are encouraged to exercise your right to respond to the concern. If you feel that it does not accurately represent what happened, you should discuss this with your site lead and this will be fed back to the QAU.

5) Can I use supporting statements from other professionals supporting my professionalism?

This is not needed. What is required is a simple and short statement about the concern and an evaluation of that with reflection.