

Complaints Procedure

What To Do If Things Go Wrong

If you wish to complain about any aspect of our services or programmes or any aspect of our provision outlined in our Charter, Edge Hill University has an agreed and published Student Complaints Procedure. This is available in your Student Handbook or through the Student Information Desk in the Student Information Centre.

Why Complain?

Edge Hill University is committed to providing services and provision of the highest quality as outlined in our Charter. Our Student Charter outlines what you can expect from us as a University (**your rights**) as well as defining your corresponding responsibilities (**your responsibilities**).

We do however recognise that on occasion you may feel we have not met our specified standards and that you have legitimate cause for complaint. If this is the case, we encourage you to tell us. At the same time however, please make sure that, in raising possible matters of complaint, that you recognise your own responsibilities as a student, both in terms of your academic commitments and general behaviour and consideration towards others.

This Complaints Procedure is intended to help students bring matters of concern about their experiences of our services and provision to our attention and to enable investigation of those concerns with the aim of satisfactory resolution. We regard student feedback, both negative and positive, as a valuable resource to help us improve the quality of our services and provision to students, as well as helping us resolve any particular problems arising for you. The complaints procedure seeks to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved. It is based on the belief that complaints from students should be taken seriously, investigated promptly and dealt with as closely as possible to their origins. For this

reason all complainants are requested to try to resolve the issue as informally as possible in the first instance with the relevant department or service area. The intention is that most issues can be effectively handled locally, in a spirit of conciliation. Thus, the formal complaints procedure should be seen as a last resort in the search for a solution.

Edge Hill University therefore sees the use of its Complaints Procedures as a positive, non-threatening means for change to the benefit of all.

The following guidelines provide a framework in which complaints made about Edge Hill University and/or its students or staff are dealt with fairly, quickly and efficiently.

What Is A Complaint?

A complaint is an informal or formal expression of concern in relation to an aspect of the University's operations, services, staff or people associated with the University or using University facilities.¹

A complaint is more than negative criticism or any objection to the merits of any decision or action taken by the University. It is a specific concern that requires a response from the University.

The Student Complaints Procedure does not cover the following:

- matters of academic judgement (that is about your academic performance) (*see section on Academic Appeals below*)
- requests for new or different services or provisions
- matters where there are separate policies or procedures, specifically:

Academic Appeals

*(An **academic appeal** is a request for a review of a decision of an Assessment Board or Panel which makes decisions about your academic performance, progression or award. For all matters relating to academic performance, including examinations and assessment, academic malpractice (cheating), academic progression, fitness to practise, expulsion or exclusion on academic grounds, contact Academic*

¹ University of Newcastle, Australia

Registry in the Student Information Centre for the Academic Appeals Regulations.)

Bullying & Harassment

(For all matters relating to allegations of bullying and / or harassment by a member of Edge Hill University contact Human Resources or Student Services. Please note that if a student wishes to raise a formal complaint of bullying or harassment against a member of staff, the staff Bullying and Harassment Policy will be used.)

Disciplinary

(All matters relating to complaints about student conduct and behaviour will be dealt with under the Student Code of Behaviour and Disciplinary Procedures. For all matters relating to appeals against disciplinary action or sanctions, students should follow the appeals process in the Student Regulations including the Student Code of Behaviour & Disciplinary Procedures for Students.)

Research Misconduct

(All matters relating to Research Misconduct are dealt with under the Research Ethics Code of Conduct and the Malpractice Regulations For Research Degrees. Students should contact the Graduate School Support Team in Academic Registry for further information.)

Whistleblowing

(The University operates a separate whistleblowing procedure. Students should contact Student Services for information, advice and guidance in the first instance.)

We recognise that on rare occasions complex issues may arise where an issue can be classified as either a complaint or an appeal. Under these circumstances our procedures allow the facility for reclassification of an issue as either a complaint or an appeal. Such issues would not however be dealt with under more than one procedure.

WHO CAN COMPLAIN?

This procedure is for use by any student or prospective student, who seeks or receives a service from Edge Hill University. Complaints are usually made by individual students or by groups of students.

A person's capacity to make a complaint only exists in relation to issues which affect his or her interests, therefore a person does not have the authority to make a complaint on behalf of others. Complaints may not be lodged by a representative, a parent or any other third party. Complaints made by groups of students must therefore be confirmed and signed by all parties.

Students studying at Partner Colleges (franchised centres) are required to follow the Partner College's (franchised centre's) Complaints Procedures in the first instance. Students studying at Partner Colleges (franchised centres) do however have the ultimate right to complain to Edge Hill about academic matters. Any academic appeal should be made directly to the Academic Registrar at Edge Hill University.

WHAT ARE THE GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR MAKING AND HANDLING COMPLAINTS?

Handling of Complaints

As a general principle, the University seeks to respond to complaints in an open and constructive manner and in accordance with the principles of natural justice.

To this end, the University will:

- ensure all parties to a complaint are advised on what to expect during the complaint handling process
- carry out the complaint handling process in a transparent way, ensuring that all parties involved in the complaint have access to any allegations and evidence presented
- provide all parties with the opportunity to participate in the process
- treat all parties in a respectful manner
- not discriminate or take action against any individual making a complaint, unless it is found to be malicious or vexatious
- provide reasons for any decisions made.

All complaints will be taken seriously and, as far as is reasonable, be treated in a consistent fashion throughout the University. The same issue will not be dealt with under more than one internal process at the same time. Wherever possible, the concern(s) raised will be dealt with in totality through the investigation process.

In line with our equality and diversity policy, all complainants will be treated equally and students who make complaints will not suffer any disadvantage or recrimination as a result of making a complaint. Only where complaints are proven to be malicious or vexatious may there be any recourse to disciplinary investigation and possible sanction against the complainant.

As a general rule, complaints, which are made more than three months after the incident or action being complained about will not be investigated.

Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled sensitively and with due consideration to confidentiality for students and staff. Any person named in a complaint however, will be informed of the complaint, supplied with a copy of the complaint and any evidence in relation to it and be informed of the outcome. They will also have a right of reply as part of the investigative process. A complaint cannot therefore be investigated if the student does not wish the substance of the allegation to be made known to the individual concerned.

Anonymous Complaints

All complaints require investigation. Where anonymous complaints are made however it is not possible to investigate the complaint. For this reason anonymous complaints will not normally result in action under this procedure.

Third Party Complaints

Complaints must be made by students themselves and not by others acting on their behalf.

Collective Complaints

If a group of students makes a collective complaint about the same issue, each student will receive an individual acknowledgement and response letter. Each student will also be asked independently to confirm that they wish to personally register the complaint. If any meetings are deemed necessary to investigate the complaint, only one meeting, to which all complainants will be invited, will be held.

The Right To Be Accompanied At Any Stage

Students wishing to make a complaint at any stage have a right to be accompanied. In the event that meetings or hearings are arranged to

consider complaints, any student or member of staff asked to attend such a meeting or hearing has a right to be accompanied by a person of his/her choosing. Individuals are asked however to notify the University whom they wish to attend in advance of the meeting.

Help, Support and Representation

Support and guidance on procedures and representation are available from a number of sources within the University. Student Services and the Students' Union can provide general and specific support as requested. It is however the complainant's responsibility to seek advice and support where necessary.

To contact Student Services call 01695 58 4554 or call in to the Student Information Centre.

To contact the Students' Union call 01695 584255 or e-mail your Faculty Vice President, see below:

Faculty of Health suvphealth@edgehill.ac.uk

Faculty of Arts & Sciences suvpfas@edgehill.ac.uk

Faculty of Education suvpeducation@edgehill.ac.uk

Complaints to the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Governors and Other Senior Members of Staff

If a complaint is received directly by the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, the Governing Body or a senior member of staff, it will be acknowledged and referred to the Director of Student Services and the appropriate manager, who will make sure it is dealt with and enters the procedure at the appropriate point.

Multi-faceted Complaints

If the complaint covers a variety of issues, a manager will be nominated to provide a co-ordinated response.

Remedy or Redress

If a complaint is upheld at any stage Edge Hill will seek to take such action as may be appropriate in relation to remedy or redress. If a complaint is not found to be justified at any stage Edge Hill will communicate this to the complainant, giving reasons for the decision that the complaint was deemed to be unfounded.

Reimbursement of Expenses

If a complaint is upheld, Edge Hill will meet any reasonable 'out of pocket' expenses connected with the formal stage of the procedure. This may include travel and subsistence costs incurred in connection with the student's attendance at a complaint hearing. Any legitimate expenses will only be paid on production of valid receipts.

Recording of Complaints

Every department or service area must notify the Student Information Desk at the Student Information Centre of every formal complaint received, giving details of the complaint, the date received, its resolution and outcome, including the date of resolution. Records of any correspondence or investigation of the complaint should be kept throughout the procedure under confidential cover and destroyed in line with the University's guidelines on the handling and storage of confidential information.

Time Limits

Staff will make every effort to keep to the time limits set out in this procedure. However, where, for good reason, this is not possible, the complainant will be kept informed of progress.

HOW, WHERE, AND WHEN AND TO WHOM TO COMPLAIN?

The procedure aims to be simple, clear and fair to all parties involved and seeks to allow issues to be explored in a supportive conciliatory framework. Informal resolution is encouraged at every stage of the process. The formal complaints procedure should only be used as a last resort.

STAGE 1 – The Informal Stage

Members of the Edge Hill University Community are encouraged to raise any issues at an early stage and to discuss the matter with the person concerned. Many apparent concerns result from misunderstandings, which can often be quickly resolved by talking through the matter.

You can either:

- Ring the person concerned

- Call in and see the person concerned, but please make sure you make an appointment in the interests of all concerned;
- Write to the person concerned

Informal complaints should normally be responded to *within 7 working days of receipt of complaint*. The informal stage will frequently be an oral process and records of such complaints will not normally be retained or recorded centrally, unless the complainant and the member of staff dealing with it wish to do so. If this is the case, a complaints form should be completed and used in the normal way.

STAGE 2 – The Formal Stage

A complaint that cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally may then be submitted formally. Complaints must be made within 3 months after the incident or action being complained about. You should complete a Complaints Form and hand it in to the Student Information Centre Student Information Officer, who will forward it to the appropriate Dean of Faculty/Director of Service. The Dean of Faculty/Director of Service will either investigate the matter him / herself or will delegate responsibility to another manager of appropriate standing and background to undertake the investigation on his or her behalf. The manager dealing with the formal complaint however must be independent of the complaint itself.

The Dean of Faculty/Director of Service or his or her designated alternate will:

- Provide a written acknowledgement of the complaint.
- Inform any member of staff concerned that a complaint has been submitted and provide them with a copy of the complaint.
- Review the complaint and decide whether or not to call a meeting to discuss the complaint with you and any other named party within the complaint.
- Investigate the complaint

- Seek to resolve the complaint.
- Provide a written response to the complainant outlining whether or not the complaint is upheld or dismissed. In cases where there is also a respondent, this information will also be shared with the respondent.

Written responses to complaints will be given within a reasonable time, normally no longer than 14 working days.

Copies of complaints forms may be obtained from all Faculty Offices, the Student Information Centre Student Information Desk and the Students' Union.

At this stage the majority of complaints will be resolved satisfactorily with no further action being necessary.

If however, you are not satisfied with the response received following the outcome of Stage 2, you can take the complaint further and proceed to Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.

STAGE 3 – INTERNAL REVIEW

If you are still not satisfied by the response to your complaint you may send your written complaint, together with any documentary evidence relating to the complaint, to the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students & External Relations *within 10 working days of receiving the response at Stage 2.*

No new grounds for complaint may be introduced at this stage.

(If the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students & External Relations has been involved in the complaint previously, the complaint should be sent to the Pro Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs & Quality Management).

The Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students & External Relations will decide whether to review the complaint him / herself or to convene a panel to hear the complaint and review the evidence.

Please note: This procedure also allows for the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students & External Relations to designate an alternate Senior Manager to consider the complaint.

Membership and Conduct of the Complaints Panel

The complaints panel will normally comprise three people, including the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students & External Relations (the Chair)², and 2 members of the University selected by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students & External Relations.

Selection of panel members will be on the basis of no previous involvement in the complaint at either Stage 1 or Stage 2.

In the case of all complaints reviewed by a complaints panel, the complainant can request that a representative of the Students' Union be appointed as an independent observer of the complaints panel proceedings.

In the case of a complaint where there is a specific named staff respondent, a representative of the relevant Staff Union can also be requested to act as independent observer to the proceedings.

Information on panel membership will be given to both parties to the complaint in advance of the panel hearing. Any request to veto any member of the panel for good reason must be made in advance to the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students & External Relations³, stating clearly the reason for the request.

The panel will investigate the complaint including all documentary evidence relating to the complaint. The panel may seek to resolve the complaint on the basis of the documentation provided. As necessary, the panel will invite all parties to the complaint to a panel meeting to present evidence and to be questioned on the evidence presented.

After investigation of the complaint the Chair will submit a written report & response⁴ to all parties involved in the complaint, outlining whether the complaint is justified or not and determining what actions, if any, are necessary to resolve the issue.

² or his / her designated alternate Senior Manager.

³ or his / her designated alternate Senior Manager.

⁴ normally in the form of a letter

Written responses to complaints at this stage will be given within a reasonable time, *normally no longer than 30 working days*. On completion of this stage we will send you a Completion of Procedures letter. The letter will outline to you the results of the investigation into your complaint. This letter also confirms that the internal complaints procedures of Edge Hill University in relation to your complaint have been completed.

STAGE 4 – Independent Review

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome and any decision taken at Stage 3, you can pursue your complaint further by submitting your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints.

Any student not satisfied with the outcome and any decision taken at Stage 3 can submit an application in writing to the OIA scheme using a Scheme Application Form. This form is available from Student Services or the Students' Union, or alternatively it can be downloaded from the OIA web site, www.oiahe.org.uk or requested by telephone or letter. This is Stage 4 of the procedure. Please note that time limits apply. See OIA leaflets for further information.

The OIA cannot look at any complaint if:

- It relates to a matter of academic judgement (that is about your academic performance);
- The matter is or has been the subject of court proceedings;
- It is about a student employment matter;
- It concerns an Institution which is not a higher education Institution, or
- It is an admission matter.

The OIA will normally only consider your complaint if:

- (i) you have exhausted all internal procedures;
- (ii) there had been a material administrative error or irregularity in the conduct of the investigation of the complaint

- (iii) the University had contravened any of the basic principles of natural justice
- (iv) the University had failed to act within a reasonable period of time, as specified in the complaints procedure

The OIA will not undertake a review of the complaint if they consider on the face of it:

- (i) there is no case to answer
- (ii) the Higher Education Institution has satisfactorily dealt with the complaint, see page 4 of the OIA Guide.

**If you experience difficulties or you are not sure who to contact, call in or ring for advice to the *SIC Student Information Desk* Ext. 4554. For outside calls: 01695 584554
Students & staff on the Aintree Campus please tel: 0151 529 3113**

COMPLAINTS: OUR PROMISE TO YOU

EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY WILL:

- handle your complaint in a quick, polite and straightforward way;
- investigate your complaint thoroughly;
- inform you of when you can expect a reply if one cannot be given in the first instance;
- keep you up to date on progress.

ACTIONS

In all cases of complaint, Edge Hill University seeks to ensure that appropriate and reasonable action is taken.

LEARNING FROM YOUR COMPLAINTS

In order that Edge Hill University can learn from your complaints each Dean of Faculty / Director of Service and the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Students & External Relations will keep accurate and complete records of any complaints received and any resulting correspondence, interviews and interactions. Outcomes on complaints will be submitted to Student Services who will prepare an annual report on complaints received and their resolution. This will help us to improve services throughout Edge Hill University and monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.

EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY STUDENT COMPLAINT FORM

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS AT STAGE 2

This form is to be completed under Stage 2 of the complaints procedures and should be sent to the Director of Student Services. Advice on completing the form can be obtained from Student Services or the Students' Union.

Personal Details (Please complete in block capitals)

Full Name: _____ Student No: _____

Programme and year of study: _____

Address for correspondence in connection with the complaint :

Postcode: _____ Telephone No: _____

(in the case of a group complaint please attach a list of complainants on a separate sheet of paper)

Outline of Complaint, including dates (please use additional sheets if necessary):

Please explain here what steps you have taken, together with dates, to resolve your complaint locally (as per Stage 1 of the procedures):

Please indicate, without prejudice, what outcome or further action you are expecting:

If you have written a formal letter of complaint to anyone else in Edge Hill please indicate names and/or let us know whether you intend to copy this to anyone else.

Declaration

I declare that the information given in this form is true, and that I would be willing to answer further questions relating to it if necessary.

I understand that full disclosure of any allegations or evidence will be made to any parties named in my complaint.

Signed: _____

Date _____

Office Use Only
Received by:
Date:

Acknowledged:

