

Making a complaint – a guide for students

Introduction

We set ourselves high standards and do our best to ensure you have a positive and successful university experience at Edge Hill. However, we recognise that this doesn't always happen. Sometimes circumstances or events both in and out of our control may cause you to complain.

Please remember you have the right to complain to the University. You will not be penalised or treated differently for raising a complaint.

We take all complaints seriously and will try to resolve your complaint quickly and informally in the first instance. This gives us the chance to put things right and helps prevent you being distracted from your studies.

If we can't resolve things at the early resolution stage, or you are dissatisfied with the resolution we offer, there is a formal procedure to follow.

This document outlines the definitions and processes associated with making a complaint. Please read it before submitting your complaint. You may also want to read the University's full [complaints procedure](#).

There are three stages to the University's complaints procedure. If all three stages are completed and you are still not satisfied with the outcome, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed by the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#) (OIA). This is an independent body whose role it is to review individual complaints by students. There are more details about the three stages and the OIA later in this document.

If you require this document or the complaints procedure in a different format, please contact the [Student Casework team](#).

What is a complaint?

We treat something as a complaint if you tell us you are not satisfied with

- the standard of service we provide
- something we have done
- something we have not done

The University's complaint procedure is bound by external regulations and follows a specific process. It is also time-bound.

Is it a complaint or an academic appeal?

An academic appeal relates to the outcome of an assessment or examination, or your progression. It will be based on one of these grounds:

- a procedural irregularity in the assessment process
- bias or the perception of bias
- exceptional mitigating circumstances, details of which were, for good reason, not previously available to the appropriate assessment boards via the EMC process

If you submit an academic appeal, we will check whether it might be more appropriate to treat it as a complaint. Or we might find you might have grounds for an appeal *and* a complaint. We will contact you to discuss the next steps.

Please note that complaints and appeals have different procedures and are governed by different regulations.

If you are not sure which procedure to use, you can check with the [Students' Union Advice Centre](#) or the [Student Casework team](#).

Who can make a complaint?

You can make a complaint if you

- are enrolled on a course at Edge Hill University as a student
- have recently left the University, but you must complain within **one month** of leaving

You can make a complaint as an individual or as part of a group.

I'm an apprentice. Can I use the University complaints procedure?

If you are studying on a higher or degree apprenticeship programme delivered by Edge Hill University, you are also considered to be an Edge Hill student. Our policies and procedures apply to you as they do to all students. You can use this complaints procedure to make a complaint about something the University has done or has failed to do.

If your complaint is about on-the-job training you receive from your employer, you should raise this under your employer's internal procedures.

Your Commitment Statement contains a summary of your right to complain, including your right to complain by contacting the [Education Skills Funding Agency Apprenticeship Helpline](#). You can also call them on 08000 150 600.

A group of us have the same complaint. What do we do next?

If the cause of complaint affects several students, you can make a group complaint.

You must be completely clear about who is involved in the complaint and appoint a lead student to represent the group.

The lead student is responsible for

- completing a group complaint form, confirming the names of those involved
- submitting the completed form to the staff member dealing with the complaint
- liaising with the other students in the group complaint, collecting evidence and providing regular feedback
- communicating with the staff member(s) involved in dealing with the complaint
- attending meetings about the complaint on behalf of the group

Please note, once the group complaint form has been submitted, we will not normally allow other students to join the group complaint later.

For full details please read the [University complaints procedure](#).

Can I make a complaint anonymously?

We do not usually accept anonymous complaints as it is difficult to investigate a complaint and report the outcome if we do not know your identity. In exceptional cases we may accept an anonymous case, but there must be a compelling case and evidence for maintaining anonymity.

How do I make a complaint?

There are three stages to the complaint process:

- Stage one – early resolution
- Stage two – formal investigation
- Stage three – review

At any stage in the complaints procedure we may suggest the complaint is resolved through conciliation or mediation. You do not have to agree to this - it is voluntary and confidential. The conciliator or mediator will be an independent person who is impartial, will not take sides and will not impose a solution.

A flow chart outlining the complaints procedure follows. For full details please read the [University complaints procedure](#).

Can I withdraw a complaint?

You can withdraw a complaint at any time. Please contact the [Student Casework team](#) in writing and state that you wish to withdraw your complaint. The University may continue investigating your complaint if you have raised issues we consider need to be investigated.

Can the University reject or terminate a complaint?

We may reject or terminate a complaint if, in the investigator's opinion, the complaint can be termed 'frivolous or vexatious'. This means

- The complaint has no serious purpose
- The complaint is intended to cause annoyance or disruption
- You are seeking an unrealistic remedy

Please refer to the [University complaints procedure](#) for full details of the circumstances for rejecting or terminating a complaint.

The role of the student casework team

It is our job to ensure that students and staff are supported through the complaint process. We ensure the complaint process meets University regulations and is fair and reasonable to all parties. This helps us manage your expectations.

We offer non-judgemental service to both students and staff involved in a complaint.

A guide to the complaints process

Your initial complaint must be made within three months of the incident affecting you.

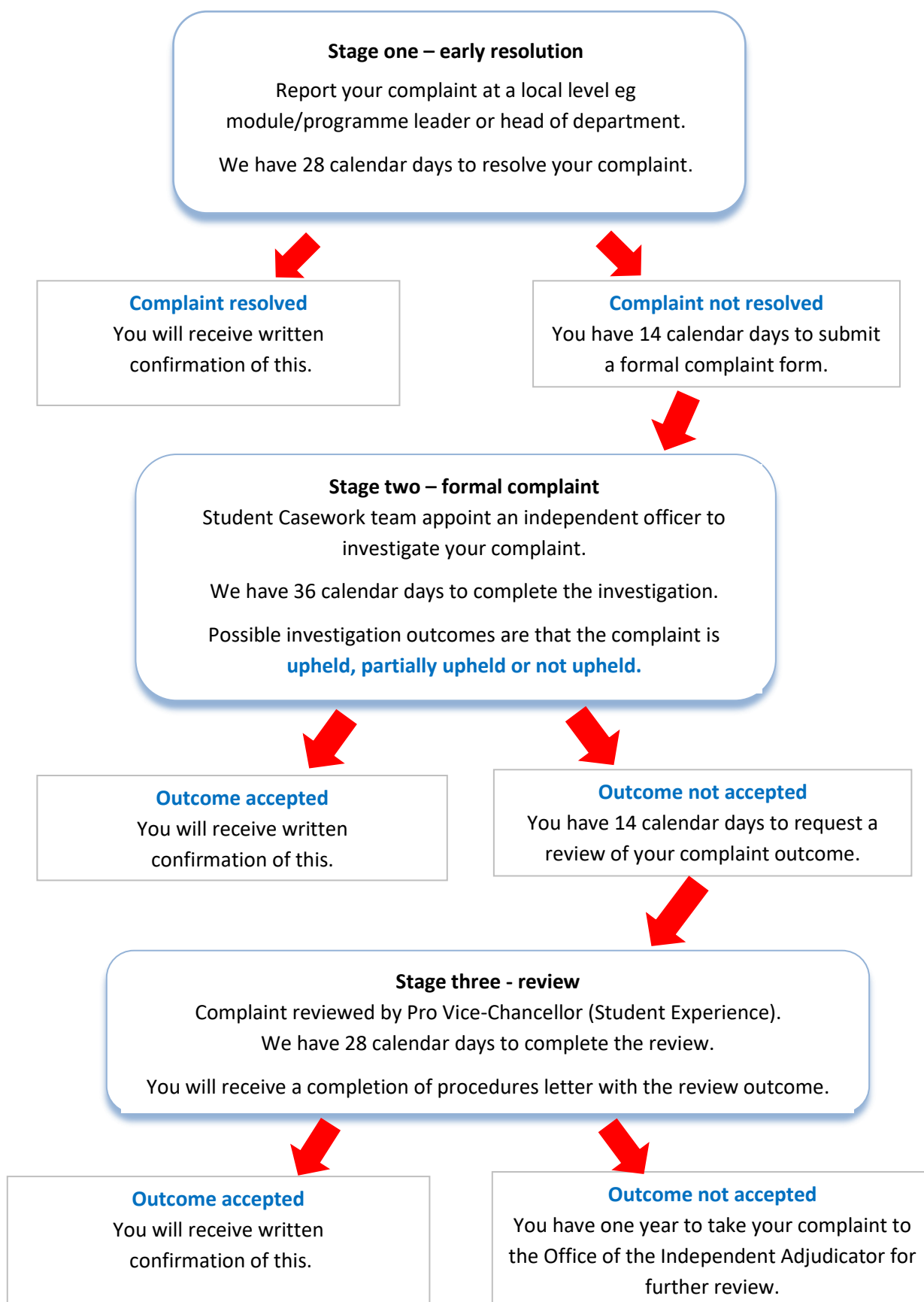


Figure 1 A guide to the complaints process

Stage one – early resolution

All complaints should start at a local level. You can do this by identifying a member of staff to direct your complaint to. This will usually be one of the following:

- Your course tutor
- Your module leader
- Your programme leader
- The faculty administration manager
- A manager in the University service involved
- A member of the department or faculty who you feel comfortable talking to

If you are not sure who to direct your complaint to, you can ask for clarification and advice from the [Students' Union Advice Centre](#), or email the [Student Casework team](#).

How do I word my complaint?

Once you have identified the staff member to direct your complaint to, send them an email with the word 'Complaint' in the subject line. Your email should

- state that you wish to make a complaint
- ask for an appointment to discuss it
- include an overview of the complaint in the body of your email or as an attachment
- include the outcome you are hoping for from your complaint

What is the timeframe for a stage one complaint and when will you respond?

You must make your complaint within three months of the date the matter affected you. The University must respond to you within 28 calendar days of receiving your complaint.

For full details of this stage, please read the [University complaints procedure](#).

Stage two – formal investigation

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of stage one of the process, you can request to progress to a formal investigation.

How do I start or continue my complaint at stage two?

Please complete a [complaint form](#) and send it to complaints@edgehill.ac.uk along with copies of any documents or evidence which support your complaint.

Can I email my form and evidence documents?

Yes, but you must make sure that any scanned documents are clear and have not been reduced in size to a point where they are illegible. Send your form and evidence to complaints@edgehill.ac.uk.

What type of documents can I include as evidence?

You are supplying evidence which supports your complaint. It must be clear how the documents you include relate to the points you are making. Although the following list is not exhaustive, acceptable documents might include:

- emails and letters
- transcripts
- course documents and information
- contracts
- receipts, tickets
- medical evidence eg letter from a doctor or consultant
- witness statements

What is the timeframe for a stage two complaint and when will you respond?

If you are starting your complaint at stage two, we must receive your completed complaint form within three months of the date the matter first affected you.

If you want to escalate your complaint to stage two, you must submit your completed complaint form within 14 calendar days of the date we notified you of the stage one outcome.

Once we have received your complaint form, we have 36 calendar days to complete our investigation and communicate the outcome to you.

What happens in a formal investigation?

As soon as we receive your request for a formal investigation, we check it for any omissions or mistakes and acknowledge its receipt by email. We will then

- inform the department or faculty of your complaint
- inform any a member of staff or other person named in your complaint
- provide those concerned with a copy of your complaint form and supporting documents

We then appoint a member of staff to investigate your complaint. They will be independent to you, your faculty, department and any person named in your complaint. We will tell you who the investigating officer is.

We treat all complaints individually, and although we follow a common process the investigating officer's approach may vary. Nevertheless, they will usually

- meet with you
- gather information about the issues you have raised by talking to you and other people

- consider the documents you have provided
- consider other documents discovered as part of their investigation

The investigating officer will then form a conclusion based on the evidence they have collected and will notify you of the outcome in writing. They have the authority and discretion to consider any reasonable options to resolve your complaint.

The Student Casework team will send you the outcome of the investigation and a copy of the investigating officer's report.

For full details of this stage, please read the [University complaints procedure](#).

Stage three – review

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of stage two, you can request a review – however, you must meet certain grounds.

At the review stage, we will consider how your complaint has been dealt with and whether the process has been fair and reasonable. We will not consider a new complaint at this stage.

What are the grounds for requesting a review?

You may request a review if you believe one or more of the following apply:

- the investigation was not conducted fairly
- the investigation failed to take account of relevant material
- new evidence has come to light which, for valid reasons, you were unable to provide earlier in the complaints process; and which would have materially affected the decision made at stage two
- the decision reached was wholly unreasonable

I believe I have grounds for requesting a review – what do I do next?

You need to complete the [review request form](#), stating which grounds apply. Please send your completed form to complaints@edgehill.ac.uk.

For more information on this, please read the full [complaints procedure](#).

What is the timeframe for a review and when will you respond?

You have 14 calendar days from the receipt of the outcome of stage two to request a review. The University has 28 calendar days to complete the review and send a written outcome to you.

The review will be completed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor or other designated senior member of staff. You will be notified of the outcome in writing.

The written outcome will include a Completion of Procedures letter, which states that you have reached the end of the University's complaints procedure. It also advises you that you can now ask the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#) to review our decision.

What are the possible outcomes of a review?

If any or all of the grounds for review are met, the reviewer may consider one or more of the following actions to resolve your complaint:

- Refer the matter back to the Stage 2 investigator, with directions on how to deal with the ground(s) for review which have been established
- Instigate a fresh investigation using a different senior manager
- Refer the matter for early resolution
- Conclude the matter by offering a resolution
- Refer the matter to mediation
- Convene a review panel to consider the complaint

What happens if a review panel is convened?

A review panel has the same powers as a reviewer and has sole responsibility for resolving your complaint. The panel will normally be held within 14 days of the reviewer's decision to convene a panel.

What happens if I am unable to attend the panel?

If, for good reason, you are unable to attend the meeting then the meeting may be deferred to a subsequent date where this is approved by the Head of Student Casework. If you decline the invitation to attend the meeting for voluntary reasons or fail to attend without prior notification, the panel may proceed in your absence.

Who will be on the panel and what is the panel's role?

A review panel will comprise four members, as follows:

- Three senior managers from the University, who are all independent of your complaint, one of whom will act as Chair
- One member of the Students' Union

The Head of Student Casework (or their nominee) may attend to offer procedural advice and guidance to the panel. A non-voting secretary may also attend to record the discussion.

The Director of Governance and Assurance has the right of attendance at any student casework panel.

For regulated programmes: Where an external representative of the profession concerned was involved in the original decision making process, the appeal panel will also include an equivalent professional who has no prior association with the student.

What is my role at the panel?

You may provide additional written material for the panel's consideration and will be invited to attend the panel hearing and present your case. Any additional written material must be submitted to the panel secretary/Student Casework team at least five working days before the meeting.

You may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend. Appendix 23 to the Academic Regulations provides further details on the role of a students' friend in academic conduct procedures.

An agenda for the review panel is appended.

How will I be notified of the outcome?

The outcome of a complaint review panel will be to either

- dismiss the complaint and uphold the decision of the stage two complaint investigator, or
- uphold the complaint and recommend a resolution to the complaint

A decision regarding the outcome of your case will be communicated to you within 28 days of the panel taking place. This timescale allows for follow up work or further advice the panel may wish to obtain given the panel meeting would be an exploratory process.

A completion of procedures notification will be issued with the decision letter to advise that the University's procedures are complete and to inform you of the next steps.

How do I take my complaint further?

If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome of the review or the review panel, you can take your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The OIA is an independent body whose role is to review individual complaints from students. You have one year from the date of your Completion of Procedures letter to ask the OIA to review your complaint. You must use the OIA's own [complaint form](#) and follow their procedures. There is more information on the [OIA website](#).

If you need help or guidance in dealing with the OIA, please contact [Edge Hill Students' Union](#).

Other information about the complaints process

My complaint needs resolving urgently – what can I do?

When you first tell us of your complaint, you must make it clear that it is urgent and provide clear reasons why it needs immediate attention. For example:

- it involves a threat of serious harm
- the impact of the issues raised might harm your health
- you are experiencing significant distress
- it relates to disability support
- the issues are of a highly sensitive nature

Should I disclose my disability when I make a complaint?

Disclosing a disability is a personal decision and we understand that you may want to keep it confidential.

Even if you have not previously disclosed your disability, we encourage you to do so if you make a complaint. This is because we want you to be able to participate fully in the complaints process and can offer support and/or reasonable adjustments to help this happen. We will discuss confidentiality and reassure you on the confidential nature of the process. Please contact the [Student Services Inclusion team](#).

Where can I find help, support and advice before submitting my complaint?

This document provides an overview of the complaints process. Before you make a complaint we recommend you read the [University's complaints procedure](#) and any relevant regulations, policies and procedures, including the student charter.

We also advise you to seek early advice, guidance and support from Edge Hill Students' Union.

Please remember that discussing your complaint or submitting documents to Edge Hill Students' Union is not the same as making a complaint under this procedure. The Students' Union will not make a complaint on your behalf. The complaints procedure does not start until you have submitted your complaint to the University.

What should I do if my issue isn't covered by the complaints procedure?

The following table outlines who to contact if your issue is not covered by the complaints procedure.

Your concerns	What to do and who to contact
Disputes or appeals about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic performance or results • the outcome or action taken against you for academic malpractice • the outcome of disciplinary action taken against you • the outcome of a fitness to practice panel 	For all these matters you may be able to appeal . Please contact the Student Casework team .
Disputes about decisions made about your fitness to study.	You may be able to appeal. Please read the fitness to study procedures . Contact Student Services .
Bullying or harassment by another student.	You may be able to make a complaint under the bullying and harassment policy . Contact Student Services .
Bullying or harassment by a member of staff.	Please contact complaints . They will advise you of the specific procedures to follow.
Matters relating to your student loan, including issues with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Student Loan Company • Student Finance England 	These are independent organisations with their own complaints procedures. Please contact the Student Loan Company or Student Finance England directly.
Requests for new or different University services or provision.	Please contact your programme board or staff-student consultative forum.
Complaints about Edge Hill Students' Union.	This is an independent organisation with its own complaint procedures. Please contact Edge Hill Students' Union directly.
Complaints against partner institutions.	Please read the University's complaints procedure for full details of what to do or contact complaints .
Complaints against further education colleges.	Please read the University's complaints procedure for full details of what to do.

Appendix 1 – Agenda for a complaint review panel

All documentation relating to the complaint will be provided to the panel members in advance of the meeting.

Before the formal meeting commences, the review panel members will deliberate in private to discuss the case and highlight any areas which they believe will require discussion.

1. The Chair will call for the student to enter the room and will
 - a. welcome the student and introduce the panel members
 - b. outline the remit of the panel and procedure that will be followed
2. The Chair will invite the student to present their case. The Chair will then invite the panel members to ask the student any questions
3. When the Chair is satisfied that the panel has received all of the relevant information or evidence, the Chair will ask the student if they have anything further to add. The Chair will also ask the student whether they feel they have had a fair opportunity to present their case to the Panel.
4. The Chair will outline that the Panel will now consider their decision in private and that the decision will be communicated in writing within 28 calendar days from the meeting
5. The Panel will recount the information and evidence heard and discuss whether a case has been made to overturn the decision of the Stage Two Investigator
6. The Panel may need to do some follow up work or obtain further advice outside of the Panel hearing to reach a decision.
7. The panel will decide the outcome of which will be to either
 - dismiss the complaint and uphold the decision of the Stage Two investigator, or
 - uphold the complaint and recommend a resolution to the complaint