Making a Complaint -

A Guide for Students

For enquiries, please contact the Student Casework Team.

# 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.

Throughout the complaint process we expect you, your representatives and any staff members involved to act reasonably and fairly towards each other and treat the process itself with respect.

We take all complaints seriously and will try to resolve your complaint quickly and informally in the first instance (Stage 1 - Early Resolution). This gives us the chance to put things right and helps prevent you from 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 [Student Complaints Procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/document/complaints-procedure/), the contents of which take precedence over this guide.

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](https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us/) (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
* an action we should have taken but did not

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. It will be based on one or more of the following grounds:

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

Please note:

* If your appeal cites *only* ground 3 (EMC/PC), you need to complete a Personal Circumstances (PC) form and submit it to Academic Registry
* If your appeal cites ground 3 *as well* as grounds 1 and/or 2, you should submit an academic appeal *and* a Personal Circumstances form

If you submit an academic appeal, the Student Casework Team will check the information provided to determine whether it is more appropriate to treat the matter as a complaint. Sometimes, we might find you might have grounds for an appeal *and* a complaint, although we would not normally run both procedures at the same time. We cannot always prescribe the process that you should follow, however we will contact you to advise you and discuss the next steps. You can also seek independent advice from the Students’ Union Advice Centre.

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 as a student on a course at Edge Hill University
* have left the University, no longer than **one month** after the end of the published term date
* are an external student undertaking reassessment

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 an apprentice, the University considers you to be a registered 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. The University will support you with this, so it is good practice to discuss this with your department.

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?

Where the subject matter of your complaint affects more than one student, you can submit 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 and 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

Each member of the group must provide their written consent for the lead student to represent them in the complaint.

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 Section 8 of the [University’s Student Complaints Procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/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.

# Making a complaint

There are three stages to the complaint process:

* Stage 1 – Early Resolution
* Stage 2 – Formal Investigation
* Stage 3 – Review

Complaints normally start at a local level as they may be resolved through the early resolution process. There are more details in the next section of this guide.

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’s Student Complaints Procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/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. In some cases the University may continue investigating your complaint, for example, if you have raised issues we consider need to be investigated to achieve learning outcomes.

### Can the University reject or terminate a complaint?

We may reject or terminate a complaint if the complaint can be termed as ‘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

If we decide to terminate consideration of your complaint we will write to you explaining our reasons for doing so.

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

Summary - a guide to the complaints process

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

or within one month of leaving the University.

**Stage 1 – Early Resolution**

Report your complaint at a local level eg module/programme leader or head of department.

We have four weeks to resolve your complaint.

Complaint not resolved

You have 14 calendar days to submit a formal complaint form requesting escalation

Complaint resolved

You will receive written confirmation of this. Process has now ended

**Stage 2 – Formal Investigation**

Student Casework team appoint an independent officer to investigate your complaint.

The investigator has six weeks to complete the investigation.

Possible investigation outcomes are that the complaint is

 upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

Outcome not accepted

You have 14 calendar days to request a review of your outcome

Outcome accepted

You will receive written confirmation of this within 10 days of the investigation

**Stage 3 - Review**

Complaint reviewed by Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience).

This is not usually a reinvestigation.

We have six weeks to complete the review and notify you of the outcome.

You will receive a Completion of Procedures letter with the review outcome.

If you remain dissatisfied

You have one year to take your complaint to the

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for further review.

Figure 1 Summary of student complaints procedure

# The complaints process

There are three stages to the University’s complaints process.

## Stage 1 – Early Resolution

You should try to resolve your complaint at a local level first. 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 a staff member to direct your complaint to, it is helpful 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 kind of outcome can I reasonably expect?

When dealing with a complaint, the aim of any recommendations we make should be to return you to the position you were in before the circumstances of the complaint. Any recommendations for putting things right [follow OIA guidelines](https://www.oiahe.org.uk/about-us/reviewing-complaints/what-happens-when-a-student-complains-to-us/putting-things-right/what-about-distress-and-inconvenience/). Some examples of practical outcomes as a remedy to your complaint include (but are not limited to)

* Offering you a fresh assessment opportunity
* Recommending a change of personal tutor
* Offering you an apology on behalf of the University
* Re-marking work following the correct assessment procedure

It is very unusual for the University to offer financial remedies, such as fee waivers, as a complaint outcome. However where this does happen, please note that the funds are returned to their source - that is, tuition fees are returned to the Student Loans Company.

### What is the timeframe for a Stage 1 complaint and when will I receive a response?

You must make your complaint within three months of the date the matter affected you or within one month of leaving the University. The University must respond to you within four weeks of receiving your complaint. Please note that this timeframe may be slightly extended due to public holidays or University closure days.

For full details of this stage, please read the [University complaints procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/).

## Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 of the process, you can request to progress to a formal investigation.

In certain circumstances you may wish to start your complaint at Stage 2. However, if you choose to do this, you would miss out on the first stage of the process. In such cases you should complete a [complaint form](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/) 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, submitting your complaint by email is preferable, 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, so you should include any evidence you feel is relevant. However, 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 2 complaint and when will I receive a response?

If you are starting your complaint at Stage 2, we must receive your completed complaint form within three months of the date the matter first affected you or one month after you leave the University.

If you are progressing an existing complaint, you must submit your completed complaint form or a request for escalation within 14 calendar days of the date we notified you of the Stage 1 outcome. The 14-day period begins the day after you are notified.

Once we have received your complaint form, we have six weeks to complete our investigation and communicate the outcome to you. Please note that this timeframe may be slightly extended due to public holidays or University closure days.

### 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, or if more appropriate we will liaise with their line manager or head of department

We then appoint a senior member of staff to investigate your complaint. They will be independent to you, your immediate academic 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

* offer to meet with you and arrange a meeting if you agree
* gather information about the issues you have raised by talking to you and other people
* consider the documents you have provided
* consider other documents which are relevant to their investigation

The investigating officer will then form a conclusion based on the evidence they have collected and reviewed. They have the authority and discretion to consider any reasonable remedies to resolve your complaint. This may include making recommendations to any associated department or persons related to the complaint.

The Student Casework team will email you the outcome of the investigation and a copy of the investigating officer’s full report.

For full details of this stage, please read the [University complaints procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/).

## Stage 3 – Review

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, you can request a review – however, your request 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 or re-investigate your original 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 2
* the decision reached was wholly unreasonable

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

Details on how to request a review and the date by which you should do this will be included in the Stage 2 outcome letter. You then need to complete the [review request form](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/), stating which grounds apply. Please send your completed form to complaints@edgehill.ac.uk.

For full details on this stage, please read the [Student Complaints Procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/).

### What is the timeframe for a review and when will I receive a response?

You have 14 calendar days from the receipt of the outcome of Stage 2 to request a review. The 14-day period begins the day after you are notified.

The University has six weeks to complete the review and send a written outcome to you. . Please note that this timeframe may be slightly extended due to public holidays or University closure days

You will be notified of the outcome in writing via email. 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](https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us/)) to consider your complaint and review our decision.

### Who conducts the review?

Reviews are usually desk-based and conducted by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) or their nominee, who will be a senior member of staff. Alternatively, the Head of Student Casework may determine that a complaint review panel is appropriate for your case.

Please note that whether the review is conducted by a sole reviewer or a review panel, the remit is the same. They will not reinvestigate the case and will not consider a new complaint or any new aspect of the complaint. For full details of a reviewer’s remit, please read the [Student Complaints Procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/).

### 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
* Offer a remedy which was offered at an earlier stage in the process
* Instigate a fresh investigation using a different senior manager
* Refer the matter for informal resolution
* Conclude the matter by offering a resolution
* Refer the matter to mediation

### What happens if a complaint review panel is convened?

A review panel has the same powers as a reviewer and has sole responsibility for resolving your complaint. A review panel is also a desk-based process, although in exceptional circumstances you may be invited to attend the panel meeting and present your case and answer any questions the panel may have.

### Who will be on the panel?

A review panel will comprise three members, as follows:

* Two senior managers from the University, who are all independent of your complaint, one of whom will act as Chair
* A representative of the Students’ Union

The Head of Student Casework (or their nominee) may attend to offer procedural advice and guidance to the panel. A member of the Student Casework team will act as panel secretary and 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 review panel will also include an equivalent professional who has no prior association with the student.

### How will I be notified of the outcome?

The outcome of a complaint review or review panel will be to either

dismiss the complaint and uphold the decision of the Stage 2 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 four weeks of the panel taking place.

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](https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us/) and follow their procedures. There is more information on the [OIA website.](https://www.oiahe.org.uk)

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. If you would like specific support or guidance relating to a disability, 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](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/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.

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| 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?

This 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* 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](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/departments/support/gqasc/student-casework/academic-appeals-form/). Please contact the Student Casework team. |
| Disputes about decisions made about your fitness to study. | You may be able to appeal. Please read the [Support to Study Procedures](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/document/appendix-16-fitness-to-study-procedures-2022-23/).Please contact Student Services. |
| Bullying or harassment by another student. | You can complain about the behaviour of another student by contacting the Student Resolution Service. They may advise you about the student disciplinary procedure. You may also be able to make a complaint under the [bullying and harassment policy](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/student-bullying-and-harassment-policy/). Please contact Student Resolution Service. |
| Bullying or harassment by a member of staff. | Please contact Complaints.They will advise you of the specific procedures to follow and if appropriate will liaise with colleagues in HR. |
| Matters relating to your student loan, including issues with * 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](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/35718/b3ee52bd6da28b640e65e114be8eab93/Complaints_Policy_and_Procedure.pdf) directly.  |
| Complaints against partner institutions. | Please read the [University’s complaints procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/complaints-procedure/) for full details of what to do or contact Complaints.  |
| Complaints against further education colleges. | Please read the [University’s complaints procedure](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/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 meeting commences, panel members will discuss the case in private and agree any areas they believe will require discussion.

The panel will proceed as follows:

The Chair will call for the student to enter the room and will

* welcome the student to the meeting and introduce the panel members
* outline the remit of the panel and procedure that will be followed

The Chair will invite the student to present their case and then invite the panel members to ask the student any questions.

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.

The Chair will outline that the panel will now consider their decision in private and that the student will be notified of their decision in writing.

## Panel deliberation

The panel will reference the information and evidence and discuss whether a case has been made to overturn the decision of the Stage 2 investigator.

The panel will decide whether any follow-up work or further advice from outside the panel is required to reach a decision.

The panel will decide whether to

* dismiss the complaint and uphold the decision of the Stage 2 investigator, or
* uphold the complaint and recommend a resolution to the complaint

The student will be notified of the panel’s decision in writing.