

Complaints Policy and Procedures - Students

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Introduction

The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) are committed to providing high quality education and services to all students and considers complaints to be a valuable source of information which can be used to inform our future students' experience.

This procedure is designed to deal with an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about the University's action or lack of action or the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the University and which requires a response.

Our aims

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint.
- To publicise the existence of our Complaints Procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint.
- To make sure everyone at UWE Bristol knows what to do if a complaint is received.
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

Definitions

We/Us/Our/the University/UWE Bristol means the University of the West of England, Bristol.

You/Your means you, a registered student of the University.

Programme means your course or programme of study.

Partner/Partner Institution means an institution or organisation with which the university has a contractual agreement to deliver courses approved by the university and which lead to university awards.

Terms and conditions means the contractual agreement in place as part of the registration process.

Reasonable means an outcome or expectation that a reasonable person might expect. This is often based on the principle of a hypothetical average person used to judge conduct. It is a neutral, objective benchmark that avoids personal biases.

Balance of Probabilities means the standard of proof used in student casework. It requires that a fact is established if it is more likely than not to have occurred, i.e., there is a greater than 50% chance that the event or circumstance happened.

Proportionate Means a fair, focused, and balanced inquiry that is appropriately scoped, evidence-based, and conducted efficiently in line with institutional policy and student rights.

Examining Board a catch all term to refer to the boards, panels and committees that exercise academic oversight in the approval of marks, grades and outcomes and confer awards.

1. Is the Complaints Procedure right for you?

Whilst the Complaints Procedure can be used to address student concerns relating to a wide variety of University matters, there may be other options available that are either better suited to the issue or that are considered preferable to raising a complaint. Other routes you can use include:

1.1 Student Reps

The role of a Student Rep is to communicate the views of students to the appropriate members of staff; the matters raised by Student Reps are those that affect students' academic experiences such as feedback regarding the content of a module, course, or programme. Further information and an online feedback form can be found on the Student Representation webpage. If you would like to submit feedback relating to broad issues of University policy or procedure, please contact your Students' Union Representative.

1.2 Academic Appeals

The Academic Appeals Policy (See Appendix 1) enables you to submit a request, within specified limited grounds relating to an irregularity or significant administrative error which has affected the outcome of an Examining Board

1.3 Student Conduct Policy

Complaints about student behaviour, such as harassment by another student, should be addressed via the Student Conduct Policy, (see Appendix 1).

1.4 Staff Grievance

The Grievance Procedure is designed to deal with grievances arising directly out of an employee's employment or working practices of the University. Further information can be found on the People and Organisational Development webpage (see Appendix 2).

2. For UWE Bristol students undertaking apprenticeships

If you are a student on a degree apprenticeship course you can make a complaint directly to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Apprenticeships Service Support team, this is in addition to your right to make a complaint directly to the university.

If you are unsure of the best course of action, please contact the Student Casework Team (see Appendix 2). Alternatively, you can speak to the Students' Union Advice Centre (see Appendix 2).

3. Our commitment to you

Throughout the complaint process we will:

- Take all complaints seriously.
- Treat you with respect at all times.
- Not treat you differently because you have made a complaint.
- Be open and accessible.
- Be accountable and apologise if we are wrong.
- Be fair to all parties involved.
- Encourage local resolution in as many cases as possible.

4. Who can complain?

This Complaints Procedure can be used by the following:

- An individual student (full or part-time, any programme of study).
- A group of students (in which case the group must nominate one person to be the spokesperson for the group, representing the group in all matters relating to the complaint).

If you wish to make a complaint it is strongly encouraged that you do so personally. Any expression of dissatisfaction received from a third party (including a parent) will be considered only with the express written permission of the student to whom the concerns relate.

4.1 If you study at a partner institution

If you are a student at a partner institution, we expect you to use the complaints procedure of your local institution in the first instance. However, once the local procedure has been exhausted you may also be able to pursue a complaint through Stage Three of this Complaints Procedure if it is in relation to a concern over which UWE has authority and the relevant operational influence under which any proposed resolution can be achieved.

4.2 If you are on a work placement

If you are a student on placement, you should use the complaints procedure of your placement provider if you have a complaint relating to aspects of your placement itself.

If however, you consider that there is relevance to UWE Bristol in relation to your concerns, you can also pursue a complaint through this procedure but please note that the concern must be one which UWE has authority for and the relevant operational influence under which any proposed resolution can be achieved. UWE Bristol may choose to share details of your complaint with the placement provider where relevant or signpost the complainant to the provider if the issue is not one that UWE Bristol can investigate.

Please note that UWE Bristol may be advised of any complaint which is raised with a provider unless it is of a confidential nature. Records of such data are maintained in line with UWE's Data Protection standards.

5. Types of complaint

A complaint may relate to programmes of study, facilities or services provided by the University, or actions (or lack of action) by university staff, and may involve but is not limited to:

- Academic matters, such as teaching and course delivery, academic support, academic supervision, course organisation or changes to your course
- Administration and service delivery, including access to and experience of university services, the application of policies or procedures, and process errors
- Advice and communication matters, including information we have provided about the university or your course
- Discrimination and unfair treatment by the University
- Freedom of speech and academic freedom
- Health and safety matters
- Student welfare, including both general pastoral and wellbeing support and support with disabilities/ reasonable adjustments

6. Criminal behaviour and legal proceedings

Complaints that allege or involve potential criminal behaviour will be taken seriously and with all due consideration of any relevant external processes.

6.1 Allegations of criminal behaviour

If your complaint involves allegations of criminal behaviour, please know that these will be taken seriously. Where appropriate, we will refer you to on-campus support services and, if necessary, to the Police (Avon & Somerset Constabulary). Our priority is to ensure your safety and wellbeing while handling the matter appropriately.

6.2 If you are subject to allegations or legal proceedings

If you are the subject of allegations of criminal behaviour or legal proceedings related to the matters raised in your complaint, we will continue to treat you fairly and with respect. In most cases, we will pause our internal complaints process until the outcome of those proceedings is known. This is to avoid any conflict between our process and the legal process and to ensure that decisions are based on the full facts.

During this time:

- We will keep you informed about the status of your complaint.
- We will signpost you to appropriate support services, both within the University and externally.
- Once the legal process concludes, we will review your complaint promptly and fairly.

6.3 Complaints and legal proceedings against the University

We expect students to enter into the complaints process in good faith. If court or tribunal proceedings are started against the University and these relate to your complaint, we will pause our internal process until the legal case is resolved. This ensures that the outcome of the legal process is respected and does not conflict with our own procedures. We will keep you informed and provide support during this time.

7. Anonymous complaints

Complaints require investigation to enable resolution. Where a complaint is made anonymously, it will not be possible to undertake such an investigation. For practical reasons therefore, no action will normally be taken in the event of a complaint made anonymously. However relevant data will be collected and kept as a record of issues arising to help inform broader University responses and improve services.

8. Complaints against a member of staff

Complaints may be made about actions or behaviour by a member of UWE staff. A student considering making such a complaint is advised to discuss the concern with the Students' Union Advice Centre (Appendix 2) in the first instance who have considerable experience of advising and supporting students wishing to make a complaint. If a complaint refers to a specific member of staff, the complaint will be brought to the attention of that individual (generally by their relevant Line Manager) as part of the investigation of the complaint.

The staff member will be kept informed at all stages and will have the right to make representations to the investigator and/or the Student Casework Team if they are unhappy with the investigation or proposed outcome of the complaint.

A complaint against a member of staff will generally be investigated in line with this procedure, however, it may be necessary to refer a complaint to the People and Organisational Development Department (see Appendix 2), particularly where the complaint is relevant to another University policy, for example:

- Staff Conduct
- Staff Performance
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Freedom of Speech
- Dignity and Respect

- Equality and Diversity
- Anti Bullying and Harassment
- Advice and support

Informal advice and information can be obtained from a number of areas across the University including (but not restricted to):

- Student Support Advisers
- Student Experience Coaches
- School Managers
- Information Points
- Personal Tutors, Module Leaders, Programme Leaders, Heads of School,
- Professional Services staff and the
- Students' Union (Student Representatives and Students' Union Advice Centre).

Students may particularly find it helpful to approach the Students' Union Advice Centre (see Appendix 2) in the first instance, who have considerable experience of advising and supporting students wishing to make a complaint.

9. Group complaints

A group of students may use the procedure outlined in this document to make a collective complaint. It is expected that one student is identified as the lead complainant and will be the first point of contact for purposes of communication. Students who are part of a group complaint, will be required to confirm that they consent to the lead complainant representing their interests at each stage of the complaint's procedure. Sometimes group complaints are more complex in nature and therefore relevant timescales as described in this procedure may be impacted and an outcome delayed. However, the Student Casework Team aims to advise of any likely impact on timescales in relation to the investigation process and communications.

For any group complaint, there can be different outcomes for different students, and not all students will receive the same outcome because of the complaint.

10. Student Complaints and Academic Judgement

While we encourage students to raise concerns and complaints where they feel something has gone wrong, it's important to understand the boundaries of what a complaint can and cannot change.

In this context academic judgement refers to decisions made by academic staff about a student's performance, such as the marking of assessments, awarding of grades, or determining whether learning outcomes have been met. These decisions are based on academic expertise and cannot be overturned through the complaints process.

This means that:

- Complaints are not a route to challenge academic judgement itself, but they can be used to raise concerns about how assessments were conducted, communicated, or supported.
- A complaint cannot result in a change to your mark or grade, or the award of credit, the exceptions to this are where there is clear evidence of a procedural error, bias, or unfair treatment that affected the outcome.

If you believe there has been a procedural issue or unfairness in the assessment process, you are encouraged to submit a complaint. We will investigate thoroughly and, where appropriate, take steps to address any issues identified. However, any changes to marks or awards will only be considered where there is evidence that the academic judgement was compromised by those issues.

11. Vexatious and malicious complaints

Malicious complaints differ from vexatious complaints in their intent: while vexatious complaints may arise from unreasonable behaviour or persistent grievances, malicious complaints are specifically designed to harm or deceive.

Vexatious complaints

The University understands that if you make a complaint then it is of concern to you no matter what others might think. However, we will dismiss a complaint at any time if, in our judgement, it is frivolous or vexatious. The following non-exhaustive list illustrates when we may determine that a complaint is frivolous or vexatious:

- The complaint provides no new information to that set out in a complaint previously submitted by you and considered under this scheme.
- You continually change the substance of a complaint.
- You have acted aggressively, or offensively, or abusively, or have made unreasonable demands on us.
- Your complaint does not clearly identify issues or matters that are the subject of the complaint.
- You have not complied with our information requirements on several occasions.
- Your complaint concerns matters which in the university's judgment are trivial.
- The complaints are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific or repetitious.
- There is an insistence in pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.

- There is an insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- The complaints are designed to cause disruption or annoyance.

Deciding whether a complaint is vexatious is a difficult challenge for the University and any decision is only taken once all relevant circumstances have been considered. This may include considering interactions prior or parallel to the complaint in question. Any final decision will usually be taken by the relevant Director of Service in consultation with the Student Casework Team.

- If a complaint is judged to be vexatious, you may be subject to disciplinary procedures.
- If the programme of study leads to professional registration you may be referred to the Professional Suitability Process.
- If the behaviour is a wider cause for concern and where we consider that there may be an underlying health problem, you may be referred under the Fitness to Study Procedure.

Frivolous or unreasonably persistent complaints will not be accepted. The University reserves the right to take appropriate disciplinary and/or legal action against anyone considered to have made such a complaint.

Malicious complaints

A malicious complaint is a complaint made with the deliberate intent to cause harm, distress, or disadvantage to another person or the University, without any genuine basis or evidence to support the claims.

These complaints may involve knowingly false statements or fabricated evidence and may be driven by motives such as retaliation, personal vendettas, or attempts to manipulate university processes.

A complaint may be considered malicious if it demonstrates one or more of the following behaviours:

- **False Allegations:** Knowingly making untrue claims against another student, staff member, or the institution.
- **Fabrication of Evidence:** Presenting falsified or manipulated evidence to support the complaint.
- **Intent to Harm:** The primary motivation for the complaint is to cause distress, damage reputations, or disrupt another person's academic or professional standing.
- **Vindictive Behaviour:** The complaint arises from personal grudges or retaliation against individuals or groups.

- **Manipulation of Processes:** Using the complaints procedure to gain an unfair advantage or derail legitimate casework processes.

Malicious complaints will not be accepted, and The University reserves the right to take appropriate disciplinary and/or legal action against anyone considered to have made such a complaint.

12. Meeting to discuss a complaint

In some circumstances, where the facts of the case warrant it, the investigator handling your complaint may arrange a meeting with you and other relevant University staff, to establish the precise cause of dissatisfaction or explore the remedy being sought.

In any meeting you will have the right to be accompanied by a friend, relative or officer of the Students' Union, who will be asked if they wish to provide input to the meeting and if relevant to speak on behalf of the complainant. A member of staff who has been the subject of a complaint will also have the right to be accompanied in any investigation meeting.

13. Your complaint

When you submit a complaint, it is important to include all relevant points in chronological order, you should aim to be as clear and concise as possible as this will help us respond to your complaint more quickly.

Be clear and realistic about the outcome you are seeking. It will be more difficult to address your complaint if your goal is unclear, or if you are asking for something that is not possible.

Details of a complaint may need to be shared with relevant colleagues for a full investigation to take place, and individuals named in a complaint will be made aware of the allegations and can give their version of events.

14. Our Complaints Procedure

The Complaints Procedure has been designed so that where relevant, a case does not necessarily have to proceed through the various stages identified in the information provided later in this section. There may be some instances where the Student Casework Team Manager can determine that it is appropriate to bypass one of the three stages. For example, a complaint may go straight from Stage One to Stage Three or be considered immediately under Stage Two where early resolution is not possible or suitable due to the character, complexity or seriousness of the case.

Complaint relating to a partner that is not resolved via their process will automatically enter this process at stage three.

15. Principles of Investigation

The University will take a proportionate approach to investigations. A proportionate investigation is one that is:

- Appropriate in scope to the seriousness and complexity of the issue raised.
- Focused on the specific allegations or concerns without unnecessary expansion.
- Balanced and fair, ensuring that the rights and interests of all parties involved are considered.
- Efficient and timely, avoiding undue delay while allowing sufficient time for a thorough review.
- Transparent and accountable, with clear documentation of decisions and rationale.

In practice, this means:

1. Limiting the investigation to the actual allegations made, avoiding excessive or irrelevant inquiries.
2. Gathering evidence that is necessary and proportionate to the seriousness of the case (e.g., not requiring extensive CCTV searches for minor complaints).
3. Mitigating bias by ensuring impartiality and recording decisions clearly.
4. Using discretion responsibly, guided by institutional policies and ethical standards.
5. Communicating regularly with the student about the progress and outcomes of the investigation.

15.1 Standard of evidence

When we review a complaint, we use the balance of probabilities as the standard of proof. This means we decide what is more likely than not to have happened based on the evidence available.

- We do not require absolute certainty or proof beyond doubt.
- Instead, we look at all the information provided and ask:
“Is it more likely than not that the events occurred as described?”

What This Means for You

- You should provide any evidence you have that supports your account (e.g., emails, letters, screenshots, witness statements).
- We will consider the reliability and relevance of all evidence, including information from staff and University records.
- If there is conflicting evidence, we will weigh both sides and decide based on what seems most probable.

Our aim is to be fair, impartial, and transparent in reaching a conclusion.

15.2 Checklist of Issues: What it is and how it helps you

To make sure we fully understand your complaint and investigate it thoroughly, we may provide you with a Checklist of Issues (Col). This checklist outlines the specific concerns or areas of your complaint that we will be looking into.

We use the Col to:

- Clarify the key points of your complaint.
- Ensure transparency about what will be investigated.
- Help manage expectations by focusing on the most relevant and actionable issues.

In most situations we will begin our investigations without needing your formal agreement to the checklist.

In some cases, especially where your complaint is detailed, complex, or involves a specific context, we may wait until the checklist is agreed upon before starting our investigation. This helps us make sure we're addressing the right issues from the start.

We will always consider any feedback you provide about the checklist and may adjust it if necessary.

If you receive a Col:

- Read it carefully to make sure it reflects your concerns accurately.
- Let us know if you think something important is missing or needs clarification.
- Respond promptly if we ask for your input, so we can avoid delays in the process.

Our goal is to work with you to ensure your complaint is handled fairly, efficiently, and with a clear understanding of the issues involved.

15.3 Timeframes

All timeframe for actions that you can take and for our responses are expressed as calendar days (this includes Saturdays, Sundays, days when the University is closed such as bank holidays but excludes the closure period in December). In some circumstances, such as a group complaint or a more complex complaint more time may be needed, and it may take longer to consider and reach a conclusion. We will advise you of anticipated timeframes and keep you updated should this change.

15.4 When we take a different approach to resolving complaints

There will be some instances in which it would be counter-productive to instigate a long-drawn-out investigation, and instead we will work with the student to find a way forward

which is acceptable to all. This may include instances where the university considers mediation as a suitable alternative remedy.

It is important to note that a complaint may not be accepted if the remedy sought is beyond the power of the University to deliver. Generally, it is not possible to overturn academic judgement in any consideration of the outcome of a complaint.

16. Stage One: local investigation

This stage involves raising awareness of the problem, with the relevant staff in the School or Service.

The University expects that most issues can be resolved informally through normal discussions and interactions between staff, students, and other interested parties without the need to instigate formal procedures.

Your concerns are treated seriously, and the Stage One responder will seek to investigate and reply to you providing a comprehensive response about the issues raised and any next steps which can be taken.

16.1 Who should I contact?

The issue should be raised with someone close to the origin (lecturer, module leader, programme leader, personal tutor, School Manager, or school or service administrator who can provide relevant contact details).

If advice or guidance is required on who to contact about raising a complaint, the Information Point will be able to provide further information.

Support and advice is also available from the Students' Union.

You can raise your complaint either through the online form or verbally and discussing it with the relevant team or individual.

16.2 Making a Stage One complaint

What should I include in my complaint? You should include the issue or issues which you are dissatisfied about, any steps previously taken to try to resolve the situation or circumstance and indicate the outcome which is being sought.

You may wish to consult the Students' Union Advice Centre (for advice, see Appendix 2).

16.3 Timescales

A complaint should be raised as soon as possible after the action or lack of action which prompted it; the greater the time delay from an action or lack of action to the submission of your complaint, the more difficult it will be for us to thoroughly investigate your complaint.

Complaints will not normally be accepted if submitted more than 28 calendar days after the issue arose unless there was good reason why the issue could not have been raised sooner.

We aim to provide you with an acknowledgement of receipt within five calendar days or as soon as is practically possible (recognising that if a complaint is addressed to an individual, that person may not always be immediately available).

If your concerns are straightforward to resolve, we would normally expect a response to be provided within 14 calendar days.

If an immediate solution cannot be found and further investigation is required, the person investigating the complaint will inform you of this as soon as possible giving indication of the likely timescale for a response to be given.

In these cases, we would expect a response to be given within no more than 28 calendar days.

We will endeavour to provide you with an outcome within the stated timeframes, if this may not be possible, we will provide you with an estimated timeframe at the earliest possible opportunity.

16.5 Outcome

The outcome at stage one will vary depending on the nature of your complaint and the findings of any local investigation.

Where the University is found to have made a mistake or fallen short of reasonable expectations, an apology will be given, the mistake rectified where appropriate, and actions taken to prevent the same mistake happening again.

16.6 What should I expect from a Stage One response?

In instances where a complaint covers more than one area of the University (e.g., because its location is not clear or because it covers more than one School or Service), the person first receiving your complaint will be responsible for leading any investigation, they will liaise with any third parties as necessary ensuring a response is agreed.

The response will normally be in made in writing.

The response will include information on the steps to be taken if you remain dissatisfied.

17. Stage Two: Casework Team investigation

This stage involves raising a formal complaint with the Student Casework Team.

This should normally only take place once an individual has attempted to resolve matters informally under Stage One and has received a written response.

At Stage Two, cases are investigated and considered by a Caseworker within the Student Casework Team. A student submitting a complaint may wish to obtain advice and guidance from the Students' Union Advice Centre (Appendix 2) prior to completing the Stage Two form.

Once the complaint has been received the Caseworker will inform the relevant School or Service and will provide a brief outline of the concerns raised (Please see Checklist of Issues above)

- If necessary, the Caseworker may contact you to discuss your complaint and/or seek more details.
- The Caseworker will then investigate the complaint, speaking to relevant parties and requesting further information or evidence as appropriate.

17.1 Who should I contact?

The complaint must normally be made in writing, using the online form provided, your complaint will then be routed to the relevant manager for consideration.

If you cannot complete the form, you should contact the Student Casework Team to discuss alternative methods.

17.2 Making a Stage Two complaint

There is a form which you can complete on the website which asks the relevant questions in relation to the complaint. This includes:

- Complainant's name, address, student ID number, telephone number, email address and programme (as appropriate)
- The nature of the complaint (in the complainant's own words)
- The steps already taken including at stage one of this procedure
- Details of the response received
- A statement about why the complainant remains dissatisfied
- The outcome being sought

It is preferable that Complaints are submitted using the online process identified. However if the complaint cannot be submitted in this way it may be possible to accept a letter or email providing that the submitted information includes those same details as listed above.

17.3 Timescales

A Stage Two complaint should be submitted as soon as possible after receiving a response to the Stage One complaint; the greater the time delay, the more difficult it will be for the complaint to be thoroughly investigated.

A Stage Two complaint will not normally be accepted if submitted more than 28 calendar days after you were notified of the outcome at Stage One, unless there was good reason why a Stage Two complaint could not have been submitted sooner.

We aim to provide you with an acknowledgement of receipt within five calendar days giving an estimated indication of the timescale for a full response to be given.

The complaint will be allocated to a Caseworker within the Student Casework team who will commence the investigation. The Caseworker will aim to respond in full within 56 calendar days of the complaint being received, providing there are no undue delays, for example in obtaining further evidence.

Where the nature of a case is such that completing the investigation to reasonable standards may not be feasible within this timeframe, for example because a complaint is particularly complex, we will provide you with an estimated timeframe and will provide you with updates on progress.

17.4 Outcome

Upon concluding the investigation into your complaint, the Caseworker may decide that your complaint is either; not justified, partly justified, or justified.

Where a complaint is found to be justified or partly justified, the outcome will depend heavily upon the accepted grounds of complaint.

Where the University is found to have made a mistake or fallen short of reasonable expectations, an apology will be given, the mistake rectified where appropriate, and actions taken to prevent the same mistake happening again.

17.5 What should I expect from a Stage Two response?

A response will be sent to the complainant in writing, it will

- Indicate the outcome,
- Reasons for the outcome, and
- How the complainant can, if they remain dissatisfied and meet the stated grounds, take the complaint further through Stage Three of the Complaints Procedure.

18. Stage Three: Complaint Review

This stage involves a review and final consideration of the case by a senior staff member. A senior member of staff includes the Student Casework Team Manager (or their nominee), or another senior manager.

The grounds upon which a review can take place include, but are not limited to:

- A review of the procedures followed at the formal stage two
- A consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable
- A consideration of whether any new, material evidence has emerged that the complainant could not reasonably have provided earlier in the process.

The Stage Three review is an impartial check of how the complaint was handled and whether the outcome was reasonable. It is not a full reinvestigation of the original issues.

Any new evidence supplied will be considered only if there is a clear case to do so i.e., it was reasonably not supplied at the time of the original complaint.

The Reviewer may seek further information from you and/or those members of staff involved in the earlier investigation of the complaint. They may also consult a senior colleague responsible for the area under investigation.

18.1 Who should I contact?

A Stage Three complaint review should be made using the online form.

Where this is not possible, the complainant should contact the Student Casework Team to discuss alternative methods.

Students may also wish to consult the Students' Union Advice Centre for support and guidance prior to submitting the complaint.

18.2 Making a Stage Three complaint

There is an online form which you can complete on [Submitting a complaint - Complaints | UWE Bristol](#) which asks the relevant questions in relation to the request for review. These include:

- Complainant's name, address, student number (if appropriate), telephone number, email address and programme
- The nature of the complaint and outcome of the earlier investigation
- The reasons for requesting further consideration of the complaint
- Provision of new evidence
- Explanation of alleged material irregularity in the investigation of the complaint
- Explanation of why the outcome is not considered reasonable
- The outcome being sought

18.3 Timescales

A Stage Three review should be submitted as soon as possible after receiving a response to the Stage Two complaint; the greater the time delay, the more difficult it may be for the complaint to be reviewed.

A Stage Three complaint should normally be submitted within 28 calendar days of the date of the Stage Two outcome letter unless there was good reason why you could not have submitted sooner.

We aim to provide you with an acknowledgement of receipt within five calendar days. You will be notified within 14 calendar days of receipt if your application meets the criteria for review.

A response will normally be sent within 28 calendar days of you receiving notification that your application meets the criteria for review.

Where the nature of a case is such that completing the investigation to reasonable standards may not be feasible within this time frame, for example because a complaint is particularly complex, we will provide you with an estimated timeframe and will provide you with updates on progress.

18.4 New Evidence at Stage Three

New evidence submitted at this stage will only be considered where there is a clear and justified reason for its late submission. This means the evidence:

- Could not reasonably have been provided earlier, for example because:
 - It only became available after the original complaint was concluded.
 - The complainant was unaware of its existence despite taking reasonable steps to obtain it.
- Is material to the complaint and could have influenced the outcome if considered earlier. There are circumstances where evidence that is material to the complaint could reasonably have been unavailable or not provided during the original investigation. Examples include:
 - **Evidence only emerged after the initial decision:** For instance, a document was created or updated following the conclusion of the Stage Two process, or new correspondence came to light.
 - **Complainant was unaware of the evidence despite reasonable efforts:** The complainant may not have known the evidence existed (e.g., internal records or third-party information) and could not have accessed it earlier.
 - **Delayed disclosure by a third party:** Evidence held by another person or organisation was requested in good time but only supplied after the original complaint was concluded.

- **Circumstances beyond the complainant's control:** Illness, bereavement, or other exceptional personal circumstances prevented timely submission of evidence.
- **Administrative or technical barriers:** For example, system access issues or delays in obtaining official documents from the University or external bodies.

Evidence that was available but simply not submitted at the earlier stage will normally not be accepted.

The Reviewer may seek clarification or further information from the complainant and/or staff involved in the earlier investigation, and may consult a senior colleague responsible for the relevant area.

18.5 Outcome

The Reviewer may decide:

- That the investigation was properly carried out and the response given was appropriate and consistent with other responses, and no further action is required.
- That there were shortcomings in the investigation carried out and/or the response given and/or that new evidence had been provided which warranted further investigation.
 - In such cases the Reviewer may decide regarding resolution of the complaint.
 - May refer the complaint back to the Caseworker for further action.

18.6 What should I expect from a Stage Three response?

The Reviewer will ensure that a response is sent to you in writing, copied to all other relevant parties.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the Reviewer may respond directly or ensure that an appropriate colleague sends a response. The response will indicate the following:

- The outcome and the reasons for the outcome.
- Confirmation that internal procedures are complete.

It will outline the right of the complainant to pursue the complaint further through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The Reviewer will provide the complainant with a 'Completion of Procedures' document.

19. Referral for independent review

If you remain unhappy with the outcome of this Complaints Procedure, you can refer your complaint for independent review. In most cases, the relevant body to undertake this review will be the Office of the Independent Adjudicator although you may also be provided with advice which may direct you to another area of Government regulation where necessary

19.1 Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) (see Appendix 2) provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. A complaint by a current or former student may be taken to the OIA once the University's internal complaints procedures have been exhausted and a 'Completion of Procedures' letter has been issued.

After a complaint has been referred to the OIA, the OIA will write to the University asking for additional information. The Student Casework Team will respond to such enquiries, in accordance with timeframes determined by the OIA.

The OIA will investigate the complaint, and if the complaint is found to be justified may make recommendations to the University, which are actioned by the University as appropriate and OIA case record details and identified remedies are included in an annual report.

Any complainant has the right to pursue legal action against the University. The Student Casework Team Manager will coordinate the University's response to such action.

Further information regarding the OIA can be found on the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education website (Appendix 2).

19.2 Office for Students (OfS)

Under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, the Office for Students (OfS) (Appendix 2) was due to take direct responsibility for the independent review of free speech/ academic freedom complaints about universities, colleges and relevant students' unions with effect from 1 August 2024.

However, the Secretary of State for Education suspended implementation of the Act on 26 July 2024 whilst a review of its purpose and provisions is undertaken. We will continue to monitor the statutory position and will update this Procedure to reflect the outcomes of that review at the appropriate time.

In the meantime, students wishing to seek independent review of a complaint about freedom of speech and academic freedom must continue to use our current Complaints Procedure, where the complaint may ultimately be referred to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for review (see above).

20. Ownership and oversight

Document name:	Complaints Policy and Procedure for Students
Version number:	V24.11.01
Equality Analysis:	[Date submitted and outcome]
First approved by:	Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee
This version approved by:	
Effective from:	01 August 2026
Next review date:	June 2028
Senior Policy Owner:	Director of Educational Enhancement and Assurance
Policy Author:	Head of Student Casework and Insight
Overseeing committee:	Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee
Compliance measures:	Annual Casework Report; Annual Quality Report
Related policies, procedures, and codes of practice:	Complaints Policy and Procedure for Non-Students
Related legislative and/or regulatory requirements	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

21. Version history

Version	Date	Summary of changes	Author
V24.11.01	24/11/25	Information on checklist of issues Additional information on standard of proof Updates to section on malicious and vexatious complaints Update on complaints and academic Judgement	Head of Student and Academic Policy Enhancement
V24.07.26	26/07/24	Minor revisions to wording throughout; insertion of references to freedom of speech and academic freedom, Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and Office for Students	Head of Student and Academic Policy Enhancement/ Academic Registrar
V22.06.08	08/06/22	Dates changes from working to calendar days	Head of Student and Academic Policy Enhancement
V22.05.24	24/05/22	New policy	Head of Student and Academic Policy

Appendix 1 – Key related policies

- Academic Appeals - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/study/academic-information/academic-appeals>
- Admissions Policy - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/structure-and-governance/policies>
- Conduct - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/health-and-wellbeing/staying-safe-on-and-off-campus/student-conduct-and-reporting-incidents>
- Fee Waiver and Refund Policy - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/money-and-finance/funds-during-study/waiver-policy>
- Fitness to Study - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/structure-and-governance/policies/fitness-to-study-policy-principles>
- Professional Suitability - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/media/uwe/documents/about/professional-suitability-and-conduct-procedure.pdf>
- Refund Policy (international Students) - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/courses/fees/paying-your-fees/international-student-payment/refund-policy-for-international-deposits#section-1>
- Report and Support - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/health-and-wellbeing/stayingsafe-on-and-off-campus/report-and-support>
- Terms and Conditions - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/structure-and-governance/policies>
- Tuition Fee Policy - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/courses/fees/tuition-fees-policy>
- A complete list of the University's policies is available on the University's website at <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/structure-and-governance/policies>

Appendix 2 – Key contacts

- Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Apprenticeships Service <https://www.gov.uk/complain-further-education-apprenticeship>
- Information Points - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/campus-and-facilities/information-points>
- Office for Students - <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/quality-and-standards/freedom-of-speech/raising-concerns-about-free-speech/>
- Office of the Independent Adjudicator - <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/>
- People and Organisational Development - <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/services/people-organisation-development/contact-us>
- Student Casework Team – <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/contact-us/complaints/advice-and-support>
- Student Representation - <https://www.thestudentsunion.co.uk/support/studentreps/>
- Students' Union Advice Centre - <https://www.thestudentsunion.co.uk/support/advicecentre/>