

The University of Edinburgh complaint procedure - a short guide for students

We are committed to providing an excellent education and high quality services to our students from enrolment to graduation. We value complaints and use information learnt from them to help us improve the student experience. If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with what we are providing, please tell us - you should feel free to raise matters of concern without risk of disadvantage. This leaflet describes our complaint procedure and how to make a complaint. Full information on the University's complaint procedure is available at www.ed.ac.uk/university-secretary-group/complaint-handling-procedure

What is a complaint?

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

What can I complain about?

You can complain about things like:

- the quality and standard of any service we provide
- failure to provide a service
- the quality of our facilities or learning resources
- unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviour by a student or staff member
- the failure of the University to follow an appropriate administrative process
- dissatisfaction with University policies

Your complaint may involve more than one aspect of the above, more than one department, or be about someone working on our behalf.

What can't I complain about?

There are some things we can't deal with through our complaint handling procedure. These include:

- a routine, first-time request for a service
- a request under Freedom of Information or Data Protection legislation
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- an appeal about an academic decision on assessment or admission
- an issue which is being, or has been, considered by a court or tribunal
- a request for compensation only
- an attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision following an investigation.

We will not normally treat information received through routine feedback mechanisms - such as responses to questionnaires - as complaints.

If other procedures or rights of appeal may help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

Who can complain?

Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by the services of the University can make a complaint to us. We encourage anyone with a complaint to approach us directly, but can accept a complaint made on your behalf (e.g. through a Students' Association representative, a friend or a family member) provided you give us your clear written authority to liaise with your representative, and provided you also give them clear authority to act on your behalf.

How do I complain?

You can complain in person, by phone, in writing, or by email. It is easier for us to resolve complaints if you raise them as soon as you become aware of the issue, and directly to the service concerned. Please talk to a member of staff within the department you are complaining about so that they can try to resolve any problems on the spot. If you do not feel able to speak to anyone in the area about which you are complaining, you should explain this when completing the complaint form.

When complaining, tell us:

- your full name and address and matriculation number
- as much as you can about the complaint
- what has gone wrong
- how you would like us to resolve the matter.

Is there a time limit for making a complaint?

Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- the issue arising, or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain.

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

What will happen if I complain?

Our complaint procedure has two stages:

Stage 1 - Frontline Resolution

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, and immediate action to resolve the problem. Where possible, and if you feel able to, you should raise your concerns with the relevant staff member. This can be done face-to-face, by phone, in writing or by email.

We will give you our decision at Stage 1 within five working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If you are not satisfied with the response we give at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to Stage 2 of the complaint procedure. You may choose to do this immediately or shortly after you get our initial decision.

Stage 2 - Complaint Investigation

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that are complex and require detailed investigation. We have a complaint form, which will help you to state

your complaint clearly to us. Although we will also accept complaints that are made in person or on the phone, we encourage you to complete the complaint form in the interests of clarity and in order to best assist the investigation process. The complaint form and any supporting documents will be seen by the person investigating your complaint, and may be seen by anyone named in the complaint and by relevant staff in the department(s) being complained about.

When using Stage 2 we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days and tell you who is dealing with your complaint
- discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied and what outcome you are looking for
- give you a full response to the complaint as soon as possible and within 20 working days.

If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will agree revised time limits with you and keep you updated on progress.

What if I'm still dissatisfied?

After we have fully investigated, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it. Our letter advising you of our decision on your complaint will give you information on how to contact the SPSO; their website is www.spso.org.uk.

Getting help to make your complaint

We strongly encourage any student considering making a complaint to consult the Advice Place, which is an independent service run by the Students' Association, and staffed by professional advisers with experience of supporting students with complaints.

An adviser at the Advice Place can:

- help you decide whether making a complaint is the best course of action, or whether another procedure may be more appropriate
- explain how the complaint procedure works, and what the potential outcomes may be
- read drafts of any correspondence you write to the University (including complaint forms), to help you make your case as clearly as possible
- support you at any meetings you attend with University staff in relation to your complaint if requested.

You can contact the Advice Place in person at either of their offices in Potterrow or King's Buildings House, via email at advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk, by phone on 0131 650 9225, or online at www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/advice.

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all students. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another format, such as large font or Braille, please let us know. You can contact us by emailing complaints@ed.ac.uk or by writing to:

The Investigations Manager, The University of Edinburgh, Old College, South Bridge,
Edinburgh, EH8 9YL

For a quick guide to our complaint procedure, please see the diagram below.

Complaint Procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by e-mail or in writing.

We have a **two-stage complaint procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need a detailed investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.

Stage 1: Frontline Resolution

We will always try to resolve your complaint quickly, within **five working days** if we can.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2.

Stage 2: Complaint Investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1. We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear that they are complex or need detailed investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **three working days**. We will give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days unless** there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it.

We will tell you how to do this when we send you our final decision.