

Student complaints FAQ

Please note this is a simplified guidance document relating to complaints and is not intended to replace, or supersede, the [University's complaints policy](#).

What is a complaint?

The University of York has based its definition of a complaint on that provided by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education in 'The Good Practice Framework: Handling Student Complaints and Academic Appeals' (December 2016).

We consider a complaint to be an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about the University's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the University.

This is quite a wide-ranging definition however it covers a student's dissatisfaction with any act or omission on the part of the University in relation to its students.

Is it a complaint or an appeal?

If you are dissatisfied with an academic decision that affects your academic progress then you should use the appeals process. You cannot however appeal against the academic judgement of your examiners. [Read more about appeals](#).

If you are dissatisfied with any other aspect of the University's actions, this would normally be considered a complaint. This includes things like the quality of supervision or feedback, or how you have been treated by a member of staff.

Sometimes a student may feel that an academic decision was affected by other circumstances, such as teaching or supervision. In these cases we will look at the particular scenario and advise which process is more appropriate in the first instance.

Who can make a complaint?

Any enrolled, or recent, student or University applicant can make a complaint. The complaint must relate to your time as a student (or your application to be a student) and should be made no more than six months after the event. There are some exceptional circumstances which can extend this time; please speak to us if you think these may apply.

Can I submit a complaint as part of a group?

Yes, although we must have agreement from all students complaining that they are happy for this to happen and we will only deal with one nominated person from this group, so they can keep everyone informed.

Can I submit a complaint anonymously?

We do not usually accept anonymous complaints. However, in very exceptional circumstances the University may, if there are very good reasons for doing so and maintaining anonymity will not hinder the investigation. If you have concerns about any information being shared you should speak to YUSU or GSA who will be able to advise.

Can someone submit a complaint on my behalf?

We always ask that you submit the complaint yourself, as this is the easiest way to allow us to investigate. In exceptional circumstances you can ask someone to represent you, however there needs to be good reason for this, for example you are unable to make the complaint yourself. We will also need your express permission to allow this. You can always seek support from YUSU or GSA if needed.

How do I submit a complaint?

In the first instance speak to your supervisor for academic issues, or a staff member or Head of Department in the area where the issue occurred; this will give them an opportunity to understand and resolve the issue informally. Or you can visit the complaints web page and fill out our form.

What happens to my complaint?

Once a complaint is received we may contact you to ask for more information to help us understand and investigate. We will want to do all we can to see if the complaint can be resolved informally. If this is not possible for any reason then you can ask that the complaint is referred to the formal stage for investigation, or if you are still unhappy you can ask that it is referred to the review stage. [Further information on what happens in each stage](#) is available online.

How long will the process take?

Once we have received your complaint we will attempt to resolve the issue as soon as possible. In any event we will contact you within two weeks to update you on our progress. If the complaint is complex or is referred to either the formal or review stage, things may take longer but we will update you regularly.

Who will see my complaint?

We will only share information required to resolve your issue, and only with appropriate people. If there are things that you have raised that you want to remain confidential you must let us know. You should be aware however that in some cases we will have a duty to share information you have provided with others. It can also be the case that not being able to share your concerns may limit our ability to carry out a thorough investigation of your complaint.

I am complaining about a staff member, will they know I have complained?

It is important that as part of our investigation staff feel confident we have given them a chance to respond and fix any issues, however we will always ensure that this information is treated sensitively. There are also strict rules in place to ensure that you will not be disadvantaged by submitting a complaint.

Very rarely, complaints involving staff members may have to be referred to our HR department. In these cases there are different rules which apply (such as confidentiality about the outcome). We will however keep you advised if it seems appropriate to refer your complaint in this way.

I've gone through every stage and I'm still unhappy, is there anything I can do?

Once you have gone through all stages, you will receive a "Completion of Procedures" letter. You can take this letter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE) so they can investigate, however you must do so within 12 months of the date on the letter. [Read more information about the OIAHE.](#)

You've upheld my complaint, now what?

Each case is different, and the potential remedies will depend on what has gone wrong and the impact it has had. In general we will look to apologise, do our best to understand the effect the issue had on you and repair it. Where we can't fully do this we will tell you what we are doing to prevent the issue from recurring, for example by changing our processes. We cannot alter an academic decision on the basis of a complaint, however we may refer your complaint to the appeals process if appropriate.

Still unsure?

If you are unsure about any aspect of the complaints procedure, advice may be sought from the Complaints Officer (complaints@york.ac.uk). [YUSU Advice & Support Centre](#) and the [GSA Advice Service](#) also provide free, independent and confidential advice.