



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*

## Guidance for colleagues who receive complaints

These notes have been produced to guide staff members if a concern is raised with them, which they believe may constitute a complaint. They should be read in conjunction with the official [University Complaints Procedure](#). These notes do not form part of the University's policy. If you are unsure what to do at any stage, please contact your Head of Department, or [complaints@york.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@york.ac.uk).

### Identifying and receiving a complaint

It is important that students' concerns are taken seriously at all stages of the complaints process. If a student has a concern that you are unable to resolve, for example, because the complaint relates to a service or area other than your own, you should refer that student to the appropriate service. If the complaint refers to restrictions on freedom of speech, please contact the [Governance and Assurance Office](#) for advice and assistance with preliminary triage.

If you do address a concern and the student is unhappy with your proposed resolution, or they believe their concern has not been adequately addressed, this should be recorded as an informal complaint. At this stage, the complaint should be forwarded to your Head of Department, or an appropriate staff member. If this is not possible, for example, the complaint is regarding the Head of Department or Service, then the complaint should be forwarded to [complaints@york.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@york.ac.uk) with a summary of the issues raised and steps taken so far.

It is important to note that all complaints should be initially investigated as close as possible to the source of the concern with the aim of achieving an amicable and timely resolution. This is outlined in the 'informal stage' of the complaints process.

There is no requirement for the student to use email or a form to raise their concerns informally, but if you do receive a complaint either by email or letter, please acknowledge receipt within two working days.

## Investigating the complaint

Once you identify that the student's concern needs to be investigated you should take a note of all key points raised by the student. This may involve setting up a meeting with the student to discuss their concerns. Please signpost them to sources of advice and support if this is the case, e.g. [University of York Students' Union](#)

Once you have all key facts you should identify what the student is looking for as a resolution, this will help keep a focus on this as you conduct your investigation. If the student's desired outcome is unreasonable, or impossible, for example, change of academic decision, the student should be informed as early as possible so you can explore alternate resolutions. At this stage it is worth establishing if the complaint should be referred to another process, e.g. [academic appeals](#) or [student misconduct](#).

Once you have key facts from the student you should begin your investigation. This may involve sharing information with others in the department who need to know about it. If the complaint deals with personal matters that may be confidential or sensitive you should ensure that the student is happy for the essentials to be shared. You should gather relevant documentation: emails, file notes or any other information that will help to assess the validity of the complaint. Where you retain, or create, any records, you should be conscious that these may be subject to disclosure under a Data Subject Access request. There are no formal rules for how the investigation should take place, only that it should be completed with due care, sensitivity, and without bias. The investigation should also be initiated quickly as facts can become more difficult to establish as time passes. It is a good idea to review the [complaints procedure](#).

Once you have completed your investigation you should set aside some time to discuss this with the student, along with any proposed remedies. You should be careful to ensure that any remedy offered is proportionate and deliverable. The vast majority of concerns will be resolved with an explanation, and an apology, for any actions that were unclear or unjustified in the circumstances. If you find that the student's concerns are not justified you should also consider whether it may be appropriate to seek mediation or conciliation from another member of staff who is not connected with the issues. You should talk to the student first if this is a potential outcome.

## If the student is still unhappy

If the student is not satisfied with the response provided at this stage you should refer them to the University's [Formal Complaints procedure](#). Support them in completing this where necessary either through providing any evidence you have already compiled and can share, or having forms available for the student to complete if they so wish. At this stage you should always issue a letter or email to the student explaining the reasons for your decision. This letter should include the key points raised by the student, the desired outcome and why this is not possible, and referral to York Students' Union for support. It must always include a link to the University's Formal Complaints policy.

# Template for Informal Complaint Responses

Date letter/email to be sent

By email to: insert email address

Student: Title FirstName LastName

Dear Title LastName,

I have reviewed your informal complaint submitted to the University on DD Month YYYY.

You state that [brief statement of complaint, this can be bullet pointed for ease]

As a remedy you request that [brief statement of the desired outcome]

*If needed, statement on concerns in complaint that cannot be considered and the reasons why (e.g. appeal or other process better suited).*

**Point 1** description of the investigation without going too much into detail. Be careful if the matter concerns any discussions with students or other staff as you may need to protect their identity through the use of initials. There is no need to give a decision (i.e. uphold/defend) but it is good to show what the investigation has decided are the facts.

**Point 2** description of the investigation without going too much into detail, as above.

*Brief description of proposed remedy - even where there is no error it is good practice to indicate what the department has learned and if any processes or clarifications are needed. If a remedy requires acceptance, be sure to add this here and give a reasonable timescale for the student to consider it, approx 2 weeks if it falls within term time, or 4 weeks outside.*

We hope this addresses your concerns, so far as reasonably possible, and that you are happy with our response.

If you remain dissatisfied with this outcome, you may choose to submit a formal complaint.

For further information please see the [University Complaints Procedures](#).

Yours sincerely,

Title FirstName LastName

Head of XXXXX

Department of XXXXXXXX