



SOUTH BANK STUDENTS' UNION

A D V I C E
S E R V I C E

GUIDE TO COMPLAINTS

Making a complaint

The university accepts that, inevitably, occasions arise when students will complain and that it is essential that all complaints are dealt with fairly, proportionately and in a timely way. If you are unhappy with an aspect of your course or have had a bad experience with another part of the university, you may want to consider making a complaint. The university has a complaint's procedure that sets out the stages of a complaint, as well as the rights and responsibilities of both staff and students during the process. If you have an issue that you think you want to complain about, please seek advice as early as possible. The Students' Union Advice Service is here to help.

What is a complaint?

The university defines a complaint as 'the expression of dissatisfaction about the university's action, inaction or standards of service which have been provided by or on behalf of the university, on or off campus, which the student(s) have not been able to resolve through informal processes. This can include things like:

- Failing to provide the service promised in the course handbook, student handbook or student charter.
- Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses, promotional material, or other university information.
- Concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching, or administration of a course. Poor facilities, resources or services provided by the university.
- Issues with contractors providing a service to students on the university campuses.

There are also situations that the university will not consider under the complaint's procedure. These are:

- Disagreement with an admissions decision (see the Applicant Complaint and Appeals of Admission Decision Procedure).
- Concerns about decisions made by an academic body regarding student progression, academic assessments and awards (see the University's Appeals Procedure).
- When a student is unhappy with the outcome of an Academic Misconduct process.
- Issues such as bullying or harassment by a student or a staff member that should be dealt with under the Student Disciplinary Procedure (for students) or the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy (for staff).
- Complaints about the role of representatives of the Students' Union.
- Matters relating to the Student Loans Company, which has its own complaint procedures.
- Concerns about decisions made under other regulations, such as Fitness to Practice Procedure or Student Disciplinary Procedure.
- Confidential whistleblowing issues that should be dealt with via the Speak Up Policy.
- Employment matters for any student who is also a member of staff at the university, which would be dealt with by the appropriate HR policy.

Who can make a complaint?

The Complaint's Procedure can be used by anyone who is or was an enrolled and registered student at LSBU. This also includes people who have been accepted to study at the university and those who are on interruption. Whether you are a current or former student, you must submit your complaint

as soon as possible and, in any event, you must make it no later than three months after the event occurs.

If an issue affects several students, you can make a 'group complaint'. In this situation, the university will ask 1 student to be nominated as a group representative who they would like to liaise with. Each member of the group must provide written consent for the representative to deal with the issue on their behalf and evidence of how they were affected by the matter.

You can also bring a complaint through a third party, such as a Student Union representative. Again, you would need to give the representative written authority to act on your behalf. Normally anonymous complaints will not be considered. However, if the university accepts that there is a compelling case supported by evidence, they may investigate a matter reported anonymously.

The Complaint's Process

The university's Complaints Procedure is made up of 3 stages:

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

The university encourages students to try to resolve issues informally and as early as possible. They suggest talking to a member of staff, your personal tutor or your Course Director as a first step. You can raise an enquiry within MyAccount or via email.

If you do not wish to approach staff directly, you can access the university's conciliation service through the Student Advisers at the Student Life Centre. Conciliators are members of academic staff with time designated to meet with students and go through their concerns. They will liaise with the relevant departments on your behalf, so you do not necessarily need to meet with a conciliator from your school to resolve your issue.

Depending on the nature of your complaint, the outcome of stage 1 will be communicated to you either verbally or via MyAccount. All actions taken in investigating the complaint (such as meeting with you) the decision, and details of what is communicated to you, will be recorded in a way that can be referred to by staff dealing with the complaint at a later stage.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

Stage 2 is for issues that have not been resolved at stage 1 or are complex and need detailed investigation. You have one month from the date of the stage 1 outcome in which to escalate matters to a stage 2 formal complaint. In order to escalate your complaint to stage 2, you must complete the additional fields available on MyAccount within one month. We will normally acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days of receipt.

This stage is managed by the university's Student Complaints Officer, although they may collaborate with staff from your department or school who were not involved in stage 1. It may also include mediation or conciliation if it is appropriate.

Before investigating the complaint, the Student Complaints Officer may refer it to be considered by a panel. The staff on the Panel should have had no previous dealings with your complaint. You would be given notice of the hearing and would be invited to attend. You are also entitled to submit further evidence and call witnesses to the hearing (as long as this information is submitted no later than 3 working days before the hearing). You can take a companion to the Panel hearing, who can be an advisor from the Students' Union or a fellow student.

This stage should be completed within 1 month of the university receiving your complaint form when you would be issued with a decision letter or complaint report. If you are unhappy at the end of stage 2, you can progress to stage 3.

Stage 3: Complaint Review

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of stage 2 on the grounds stated below you will need to submit this in writing using the case comment section within MyAccount. We normally acknowledge your request within five working days of receiving it.

Requests for review are granted on the following grounds:

- There was a procedural irregularity at the formal stage (for example, the university failed to follow the complaints procedure at stage 2, clear reasons were not provided for the decision at stage 2 or there is evidence of bias).
- The stage 2 outcome was not reasonable in all the circumstances.
- There is new material evidence which you were unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process.
- Your complaint is about a partner institution in relation to the quality of learning opportunities provided and you have completed the procedures there.
- Your complaint is about student accommodation, and you have exhausted the University's Halls of Residence complaint procedure.

Again, you are encouraged to set out your concerns as succinctly as possible, clearly explaining how your stage 2 outcome falls within the grounds for review. A member of the complaints team (who has not previously dealt with your case) will consider this.

If they are not satisfied that you meet the grounds for review, you will receive a Completion of Procedures letter within 28 days of that decision. If your matter does not meet the grounds for review, it will be allocated to a Reviewer (a senior member of staff with no previous knowledge of your case). They will review all of the evidence in your case and decide whether the stage 2 outcome stands, or they will make a different finding that overturns the previous decision.

If the decision is in your favour, you will receive an outcome letter within 28 days of the decision. If it is not favourable to you, you will receive a Completion of Procedures letter within 28 days of the decision. If you are unhappy with the outcome, you could take the matter to the OIA (Office of the Independent Adjudicator) for further review within 12 months of the date of your Completion of Procedure's Letter.



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