

Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University welcomes feedback. You can share your views through course representatives, the Students' Union, and student surveys. If something goes wrong, we recommend raising your concern directly where it occurred to try to resolve it informally. If this doesn't work, the following Complaints procedure applies.
- 1.2 A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about something a provider has done or not done, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider" ([OIA Good Practice Framework](#), point 7).
- 1.3 Complaints may include (but are not limited to):
 - i. Concerns the University failed to meet contractual or other legal obligations, including non-compliance with the Universities UK (UUK) Code of Practice for the Management of Student Housing.
 - ii. Dissatisfaction with academic provision or student experience (for example, relating to teaching or research supervision, provision of feedback and return of assessed work, or where a researcher does not agree with the outcome of the School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) review or the University Research Ethic and Integrity Sub-Committee (UREISC) review).
 - iii. Concerns about failure to make reasonable adjustments for disabilities.
 - iv. Concerns that the University did not meet its obligations to you under the Student Behaviour and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
 - v. Concerns about your York St John University accommodation.
- 1.4 You must state clearly your desired resolution. While we may not always meet your request, we will discuss alternatives with you.
- 1.5 The University Complaints Officer, usually the Head of Governance and Compliance, oversees complaints but may delegate this role when appropriate.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This procedure applies to current students or if you have withdrawn or graduated within the timeframe set out in section 9 below.

- 2.2 Complaints are student led. Complaints by third parties (for example, by individuals or organisations other than the actual complainant, including parents or carers) are not normally accepted. However, the University may make an exception if the student provides clear and credible evidence demonstrating exceptional circumstances justifying the requirement for third party involvement and there is clear, informed consent. Any such exceptions must be agreed by the Complaints Officer. Students are encouraged to seek support from members of staff from the Students' Union, who are familiar with the University's procedures and processes.
- 2.3 The policy does not apply to appeals against a decision by the University Assessment Board, for example relating to your academic award or progression on your programme: these matters are covered by the *Appeals* procedure. If you submit a complaint that the University believes would be more appropriately dealt with as an appeal, it may decide to follow the [Appeals procedure](#) instead of or as well as the Complaints procedure.
- 2.4 The University may consider a complaint alongside other procedures (e.g. Disciplinary, Support to Study, Fitness to Study or Fitness to Practise) to ensure timely and proportionate resolution. In deciding whether to run processes concurrently or pause a complaint, we will consider factors such as the nature of the issues, overlap between processes, fairness to all parties, and the risk of delay or duplication. Where appropriate, parts of a complaint may be deferred until another process concludes. We will explain our decision clearly.
- 2.5 This policy applies to students on University programmes or franchise arrangements. Complaints about Validated Partners should be handled under their complaints procedures first. Information on the University's partners can be found on the website – [Our Partners](#). If you are unsatisfied with their outcome you can submit the matter to the Student Casework Manager (casework@yorks.ac.uk) for University review **within 10 working days** of the decision from the Validated Partner.
- 2.6 For services provided by third parties (for example, Security), you should contact the organisation directly. The University ensures such organisations have appropriate complaints procedures in place. If you are unsure how to access that complaint procedure, the Casework Team will be able to signpost you. If the matter remains unresolved, you can submit the outcome to Casework **within 10 working days** for review. The University may not be able to change the outcome, but we will review it to ensure your complaint has been dealt with appropriately.
- 2.7 If a problem with a placement provider has impacted on your learning experience, you may complain directly to the University under this policy.
- 2.8 Complaints should be submitted by the student so we can understand their concerns and personal experience. Students may use support, including digital tools, to help prepare their complaint. Where a complaint is unclear, inconsistent, or does not appear to reflect the student's own account, we may ask the student to clarify or restate their concerns. This ensures we can investigate effectively and fairly. Students are advised that using generative AI to draft a complaint may pose risks to data privacy and lead to inaccurate claims which may undermine the complaint. If we have concerns about the legitimacy or authenticity of a complaint, we will seek to discuss this with you.

- 2.9 Complaints about the Students' Union or Sport Union must go directly through their respective procedures first – [Students Union and Sport Union policies](#). If unresolved, you can escalate the matter to Student Casework with a copy of the outcome letter to casework@yorks.j.ac.uk for review **within 10 working days** of the final decision.
- 2.10 Anonymous complaints are generally not accepted due to investigative limitations. Exceptions may be made if supported by sufficient evidence, at the discretion of the University Complaints Officer.
- 2.11 Complaints regarding staff conduct outside of teaching responsibilities will be referred to the University Secretary for consideration under other processes (for example, Staff Disciplinary Policy). Teaching-related complaints are managed under this procedure.
- 2.12 In cases involving the Complaints Officer or Disciplinary Officer or a Governor, the University Secretary will assess the complaint and provide guidance on subsequent actions.
- 2.13 Complaints will be handled under the current complaint procedure in place at the time the report is submitted.
- 2.14 Before accepting a complaint for investigation, the University will undertake an initial assessment to determine whether:
 - i. the matter falls within scope;
 - ii. the complaint has been brought in time;
 - iii. sufficient information has been provided to be able to investigate it; and
 - iv. the complainant is clearly identified;
 - v. the complainant has demonstrated they are directly affected.

3. Principles

- 3.1 This procedure has been designed with reference to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework and the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Concerns, Complaints and Appeals (see section 11 for the links to these documents).
- 3.2 The procedure adheres to equality and fairness principles, aiming to resolve concerns early to prevent escalation. Complaints raised after programme completion may be deemed out of time (see Section 9).
- 3.3 Key commitments include
 - i. Accessible and clear procedures
 - ii. Staff approachability
 - iii. Assurance that you won't be disadvantaged for raising concerns in good faith.
- 3.4 The University will do its best to abide by the time limits set out in these procedures, but it may not always be possible. The University aims to complete

all level 2 complaint investigations and any subsequent review requests **within 90 calendar days** from the time your complaint was accepted as a level 2 complaint, including your supporting evidence. Indicative timescales are provided for level 1 complaints. As a general principle, issues are resolved as closely as possible to the point of occurrence, but with provision for formal procedures where necessary.

- 3.5 Complaints are handled confidentially, with information shared only as necessary, for example to progress your complaint, implement a decision on the complaint, implement recommendations from a complaint or where it is required by law or in the public interest. Concerns should be flagged with the Student Casework Manager.
- 3.6 You will be provided with the information which has informed the decision relating to your complaint, subject to considerations of privacy, confidentiality and the reasonable interests of any third parties.
- 3.7 Impartial investigators will handle (Level 2) formal complaints, and decisions will be explained to you. More information on the Level 2 procedure can be found in section 9).
- 3.8 Remedies will be offered where complaints are upheld.
- 3.9 We reserve the right to refuse to investigate or to suspend any investigation where it becomes evident that police, legal, court or tribunal proceedings have been initiated in relation to the issues raised in the complaint. We may also suspend an investigation on health grounds. Suspending an investigation will 'stop the clock' on all timescales outlined in this procedure.
- 3.10 The University expects all students to treat other students and staff at the University with dignity and respect. The University reserves the right to suspend investigation of a complaint matter if there is a breach of expected standards, including where those investigating a case are subject to harassment or abuse. In these circumstances the student will be notified of the suspension and the reasons for it. If a student is considered to be in breach of University expectations of behaviour, the student might be subject to disciplinary procedures.
- 3.11 The University will determine complaints on the balance of probabilities, taking into account all available evidence obtained during the investigation.

4. Freedom of speech

- 4.1 The University is committed to protecting freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law, in line with the University's duties relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom under applicable higher education legislation. Lawful speech, even if offensive or controversial, will not normally be restricted or upheld as a complaint on that basis alone. However, we do not tolerate unlawful harassment, bullying or intimidation. We will consider whether the context, including the time, place, and manner of expression, may breach legal or University expected standards of our behaviour. We will implement our

freedom of speech duties within the context of our responsibility to provide a safe and inclusive environment.

- 4.2 Exposure to challenging or controversial ideas is a normal part of higher education and will not usually be considered harassment. However, concerns will be assessed case-by-case, and action may be taken where the manner or context of delivery crosses the threshold into unlawful harassment.

5. Communication

- 5.1 Correspondence relating to your complaint will be sent to your registered email address. You must notify the University of changes promptly.
- 5.2 The standard response time for emails sent to casework@yorksj.ac.uk is 3-5 working days.
- 5.3 We will aim to be as transparent as possible about the complaint process and outcomes, however in some cases we may have to withhold particular information where sharing it would breach our data protection obligations, where it might compromise a legal process, or where there is another legitimate reason (such as safeguarding concerns). Where information is withheld, we will inform you that this is the case and provide a general explanation of the reason, unless doing so would itself breach legal or confidentiality obligations.

6. Malicious complaints

- 6.1 The University may take disciplinary action against students found to have submitted baseless complaints with intent to cause harm and disruption. Good faith complaints will not face such action.

7. Advice and support

- 7.1 The Student Casework Team (casework@yorksj.ac.uk) can clarify queries on the complaints process. The Students' Union (su.advice@yorksj.ac.uk) offers independent advice and support.
- 7.2 Students may request reasonable adjustments to the process to accommodate individual needs, including those related to disability, health conditions, or religious observance. Please contact us by emailing casework@yorksj.ac.uk.
- 7.3 You may bring one supporter to any meetings. This person should be a current member of staff, a current registered student at the University, or a Students' Union representative. A Students' Union adviser will normally be best placed to support because they will be familiar with the University's processes. Where a complaint is submitted within the first three months of the student's studies and supportive links may not have been established, alternative supporters may be possible. Approval should be sought from the

University Complaints Officer or their delegate. Some students with disabilities may require additional external support, this will be discussed with the student.

- 7.4 The supporter's role is to observe and provide moral support. The supporter may address the meeting to clarify procedural matters but may not answer questions on behalf of the student unless agreed as a reasonable adjustment.
- 7.5 Where a student's disability or chronic condition affects their ability to participate in the complaints process directly, the University will make reasonable adjustments, including allowing formal representation (with the student's consent). The University reserves the right to ask a student to nominate a new supporter or representative if a supporter or representative is seen as obstructing the procedure, or if the supporter or representative does not treat other students and staff at the University with dignity and respect. In these circumstances the complainant will be notified.
- 7.6 Legal representation is not usually required or permitted, but if you believe it is justified in the circumstances, you should make these reasons known to the University Complaints Officer **at least three working days** in advance of the meeting(s) relating to your complaint. If a meeting has been arranged to take place within 3 working days, the student should make their reasons for legal representation known as soon as possible to the Complaints Officer. This should be done via the Casework email; casework@yorks.ac.uk. If the Complaints Officer believes the student has established exceptional circumstances for legal representation, it will be permitted. These grounds may include:
- i. The seriousness of the complaint matter
 - ii. Complexities in any evidence presented
 - iii. Likely procedural challenges.
- 7.7 Group complaints should nominate a representative to liaise with the University on the group's behalf. Each participant must confirm their agreement of the student representative and involvement in writing to the Student Casework Team (casework@yorks.ac.uk). The University may refuse to review a complaint where a student has not demonstrated that they were directly affected.
- 7.8 The University retains the discretion to communicate directly with some or all of the students individually, particularly where the substance or circumstances of the complaint differ, and to reach different decisions where it deems this to be appropriate.

8. Records, monitoring and review relating to the procedure on student complaints

- 8.1 The University will keep and dispose of all correspondence relating to level 2 formal complaints in accordance with its data protection and retention policies.
- 8.2 An annual summary of complaints and outcomes is reviewed by the Senior

Leadership Team, the Academic Board and the Board of Governors to support continuous improvement.

- 8.3 The Student Complaints Procedure will be reviewed annually, taking account of good practice identified across the sector and learning from previous complaint cases.

9. Procedure

- 9.1 Before making a complaint, you should familiarise yourself with the following procedure. It is important to be clear about what resolution you are seeking in making a complaint.
- 9.2 If a disciplinary issue arises during the complaint, the process may be paused or adjusted.

Level 1 Local Resolution

Raise the issue locally

- 9.3 You should address concerns with the relevant team or manager where the issue occurred (for example, delays in responses). If you are unsure who to contact, seek guidance from the Student Casework Team (casework@yorks.ac.uk). Many matters can be resolved satisfactorily at this stage.

Timeframe

- 9.4 You should raise your concerns as soon as possible. Your complaint must be raised **within 3 months** of the incident/s.
- 9.5 An initial acknowledgement should normally be sent to the student within 5 working days of their concerns being raised. This should include offering to meet with the student to discuss the concerns. In some cases, it may not be necessary or possible to meet with the student to review their complaint. Where this is the case, details on why this is the case will be provided to the student via email.

Guidance

- 9.6 The Student Casework Team may direct complaints to Level 2 if necessary.

Meetings

- 9.7 Where meetings are held, meetings during this stage may be minuted. They will not be audio-recorded. You should not record them without the consent of those involved. This includes the use of AI. Unauthorised recording is prohibited and may lead to disciplinary action.
- 9.8 In all cases where meetings are held, a summary of the meeting will be provided to you to confirm after the meeting.

Outcomes

- 9.9 Outcomes should normally be communicated to the student within 1 calendar month. If this is not possible due to complex cases or with multiple departments involved, the student should be kept up to date with expected outcome deadlines provided.

Concerns about implementation

- 9.10 If there are concerns relating to the outcome of level 1 discussion, for example, around the implementation of the outcome or the time taken to implement, you should contact the Student Casework Team (casework@yorks.ac.uk) to address delays.

Level 2 Formal complaint: investigation and decision

Submitting a complaint

- 9.11 If you believe your concerns have not been properly addressed at level 1, you may decide to make a level 2 formal complaint by using the [complaint form](#).

Timeframe

- 9.12 You should send your complaint to casework@yorks.ac.uk **within 3 months** of the incident or Level 1 discussions.

Initial review by Student Casework Team

- 9.13 If you have not first raised your concerns at level 1, the Student Casework Team will request you seek level 1 resolution first. If you remain unhappy with the outcome of level 1 you may then move to level 2.
- 9.14 The Student Casework Team may refer the matter to the University Complaints Officer for a decision on whether the complaint procedure is the appropriate procedure to use. The Student Casework Team may request additional information or evidence from you.

Late or rejected complaints

- 9.15 Late complaints may be accepted at the discretion of the University Complaints Officer for exceptional reasons (for example, serious illness). If the complaint is rejected due to being late you can request a 'Completion of Procedures' letter to take the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) as set out in section 10.12.
- 9.16 If your complaint is not accepted, you can request a 'completion of procedures' letter to take the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), as set out in section 10.12.

Investigation

- 9.17 If accepted at level 2, an 'Investigating Officer', who is an independent staff member, will investigate, review evidence, and conduct interviews as needed.
- 9.18 The Investigating Officer may ask you for further evidence and/or may explore possible outcomes with you.

Meetings

- 9.19 Meetings during this stage will be minuted. They will usually not be audio recorded. You should not record them without the consent of those involved. This includes the use of AI. Unauthorised recording is prohibited and may lead to disciplinary action. A summary of the meeting will be provided to you to confirm after the meeting.

Lack of contact

- 9.20 If you fail to respond to the Investigating Officer during the Level 2 process, they will decide based on the available information, with the Complaints Officer, whether to proceed or to close the complaint. You will be informed of the outcome.

Outcome timescale

- 9.21 Investigations aim to conclude **within 8 weeks** from the date your level 2 formal complaint was accepted.
- 9.22 In complex cases, or cases where the Investigating Officer has difficulty in making contact with you or with others with relevant information, the report may take longer, but you will be kept informed of any delays and the reason for

them.

Investigation outcome

- 9.23 The Investigating Officer will submit a report to the Complaints Officer recommending if the complaint is upheld, partly upheld, or not upheld. The report will provide reasons for the proposed outcome/s. If the complaint is recommended to be upheld or partly upheld, the Investigating Officer will, in all cases where it is appropriate, propose remedial action to be taken and indicative timeframes.

Final decision and outcome

- 9.24 The Complaints Officer will review the report and determine the final outcome.
- 9.25 You will receive the report and have **10 working days** to accept or reject the proposed outcome.

Next steps and closure of complaint

- 9.26 If you do not accept the proposed outcome, you have the option of taking the matter to the Review Stage, as set out below (see section 10).
- 9.27 If we do not hear from you within 10 working days, the complaint will then be considered closed with any recommendations actioned.

Concerns about implementation

- 9.28 If the proposed outcome is accepted but there are concerns around its implementation or the time taken to implement, you should contact the Student Casework Team (casework@yorks.ac.uk) to address delays.

10. Review

Requesting a review

- 10.1 If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your level 2 formal complaint, you may ask for a review of the findings by completing the [Complaint Review](#) form and sending it to casework@yorks.ac.uk **within 10 working days** of the date the report was sent to you.

Grounds for review

10.2 You may request a review of your complaint on the following grounds:

- i. If you have new evidence that you were unable to provide, with good reason, during the level 2 investigation, or
- ii. If you have evidence that the level 2 procedure was not properly followed, or
- iii. If the outcome was unreasonable in light of the evidence available.

10.3 Your request must set out the grounds for the proposed review and provide the evidence to support it.

Initial review request

10.4 Your request for a review will be considered by the Complaints Officer, or nominee. The Complaints Officer may reject a request for a review if it is received outside the deadline, without good reason for the delay. The Complaints Officer may also reject a request for a review if no evidence or substantive argument is provided.

Rejected review requests

10.5 If your request for a review is rejected, you can request a 'completion of procedures' letter to take the matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), as set out in 10.13.

Review process

10.6 Where a review is to be conducted, this will be carried out by the University Vice Chancellor, or their nominee. The reviewer will have had no previous involvement in the case. The University Complaints Officer and/or Student Casework Team will provide advice throughout the Review Stage. The reviewer will review the file, undertake any appropriate further enquires, and make recommendations.

10.7 The review will normally only consider the evidence provided during the earlier investigation of the complaint. Exceptionally, the Vice Chancellor or nominee has the discretion to allow you to introduce new material evidence at this point, if they accept that there were valid reasons why you were unable to provide the evidence earlier in the process.

Review timeframe

- 10.8 You will normally receive a response **within 10 working days** and will be informed if the review will require more time.

Outcomes

- 10.9 The Vice Chancellor or nominee may:
- i. Uphold the original outcome.
 - ii. Substitute an alternative outcome.
 - iii. Appoint a new Investigating Officer. The usual procedure set out above for the investigation will be followed.
- 10.10 Should an alternative outcome be substituted, you will be given **10 working days** to consider the outcome of the review. If you accept the outcome proposed, or do not respond within the timeframe, the matter is considered resolved with any recommendations actioned.
- 10.11 If the Vice Chancellor or nominee upholds the original outcome, or if you do not accept an alternative outcome proposed, you will be sent a 'completion of procedures' letter saying that you have come to the end of the York St John University complaint procedure.

OIA

- 10.12 If you remain dissatisfied, you may seek an independent review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The OIA is an independent body established to consider student complaints which have not been resolved internally. The deadline for an application to the OIA is **12 months** from the date of the 'completion of procedures' letter. This service is free to students. More information can be found on the OIA website: www.oiahe.org.uk

11. Associated Links

[OIA Good Practice Framework](#)
[YSJU Concerns about university experience webpage](#)
[YSJU Research webpage](#)
[YSJU Collaborative provision webpage](#)
[YSJ Students Union Documents webpage](#)
[Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#)
[QAA Quality Code - Advice and guidance - Concerns, complaints and appeals](#)

Version Control Statement

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Amendments since the last approval are listed in a table below, detailing the revision made, date of revision and who the revision was approved by.

Details of revision	Date of revision	Revision approved by
Section 2 Clarification on when third party complaints may be accepted. Addition of information relating to using generative AI to draft a complaint and if the University has concerns, a discussion will take place. Addition of the initial assessment the University will undertake before accepting a complaint for investigation. Section 3 Clarification that the University will determine complaints on the balance of probabilities, taking into account all available evidence obtained during the investigation. Section 4 Clarification that the University is committed to protecting freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law, in line with the University's duties relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom under applicable higher education legislation. Section 9 Clarification that a failure to respond to the Investigating Officer during the Level 2 process, will result in the Investigation Officer with the Complaints Officer determining whether to proceed based on the available information or to close the complaint.	13 August 2026	Chair of Academic Board
Section 2 Clarification of complaints being student-led and exceptions to this. Addition of details of other procedures that may be considered alongside the complaints policy. Links to the University's partners. Addition of use of digital tools to submit prepare complaints and when clarification may be sought. Section 3 Clarification on timeframes provided. Section 4 Clarification provided in line with Higher Education	24 June 2026	Academic Board

Freedom of Speech Act 2023.

Section 5

Clarification correspondence will be sent to student's email addresses. Removal of line detailing about using email for efficiency.

Section 6

Addition of 'disruption'.

Section 7

Clarification of when reasonable adjustments can be requested.

Clarification one supporter can attend meetings and their role.

Removal of duplication of information about supporters in the students' first 3 months of enrolling.

Section 9

Section re-formatted for accessibility.

Clarification of level 1 timeframes.

Clarification of outcome notifications for level 1 cases.

Clarification on process when contact is not possible during the level 2 process.

Clarification recommendations will be actioned if no response is received.

Section 10

Addition of outcome being unreasonable in light of the evidence available in the grounds for a review.

Clarification recommendations will be actioned if no response is received.