Introduction

The University of Lancaster Student Complaints Procedure can be found in MARP (Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures) at: https://gap.lancs.ac.uk/ASQ/QAE/MARP/Documents/Complaints-Procedure.pdf

This is a guide to make the complaints procedure easier to understand.

Whilst this guide provides the basics, the procedures above are the definitive statement. We ask you to make sure that you have read and understood the procedure before making a complaint.

In this guide you will find helpful information and tips to help you if you wish to make a complaint, as well as where to find other sources of help and advice.
**What is a complaint?**

The University defines a complaint as ‘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’.

**What can I complain about?**

You can complain about:

- Members of University staff
- An element of the University such as a department, faculty, library, colleges, student services (e.g. Student Registry), and professional services (e.g. Finance)
- The entire University

You cannot complain about:

- Other students
- Persons on campus who are not members of the University
- On-campus facilities over which the University has no authority (e.g. transport links, commercial businesses)
- Decisions of Boards of Examiners or other academic matters that fall under the University of Lancaster Academic Appeals Procedure.
- Services provided by the Students’ Union as they have their own complaints procedure.
- Any potential breach of criminal law (these should be referred to the Police).

If you have any concerns about these, talk to the Students’ Union Advice Team and they will let you know your options.
The Complaints Procedure may not be used to complain about academic decisions. Should you wish to make an academic appeal we ask that you use the Academic Appeals Procedure.

**Who can complain?**

All registered students of Lancaster University have the right to complain. If you have left the University, you can also use the procedure within **30 days** of the end of registration.

Should you want to make an anonymous complaint, the University will normally be unable to undertake an investigation to resolve the complaint.

If you want to make a collective or group complaint you may do so but you must nominate one student to act as the spokesperson for your group.

**Before I complain**

If you are considering making a complaint you should read the University of Lancaster’s Student Complaints Procedure to make sure you fully understand the stages of the procedure, its principles, scope and limitations.

Often complaints can be solved easily and informally. Chat with a member of staff to raise awareness of the problem, either by email, phone or face-to-face and they may be able to resolve the issue.

If the informal attempt (also known as Stage 1 of the procedure) hasn’t worked then you should use formal Stage 2. Formal complaints should only be made once informal solutions have been exhausted.
You should be aware of the time limits that apply to the procedure, and especially of the time limits that apply directly to you.

You should seek advice prior to making a complaint. Please consult the Advice & Help section and the Useful and Important Links section of this guide for information on where you can find advice and help across the University.

**How do I complain?**

This section will summarise each stage of the procedure, making reference to time limits and communication responsibilities of both you and the University.

The University aims to complete all aspects of the procedure (i.e. Stages 2 and 3) within 90 **calendar days** of the formal complaint application being submitted.

**Stage 1 - The Informal Stage**

As mentioned previously, Stage 1 of the procedure recommends you make every attempt to resolve your complaint at a local level. The expectation remains that both you and the member of staff will make a genuine attempt to solve any problems at this preliminary stage.

**Time Limit:**

You should raise awareness as soon as possible.

**Stage 2 - The Formal Stage**

If Stage 1 has not worked, then you should move from an informal to a formal complaint.
How do I submit my complaint?

Complaints are submitted online using the Complaints Procedure Stage 2 Application Form that can be found at:

https://lancasteruni.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_cO9s8pOc1p9xWbr

Time Limit:

We would expect you to submit your complaint within **30 days**. The University recognises that some complaints are the result of a culmination of a number of events over time, and the 30 days refers to the last one of these.

You will need to gather various forms of evidence for the application so make sure that you allow enough time to do this. Applications received after this time will need to provide a compelling reason for the delay.

What happens next?

Once the Stage 2 application has been submitted, the University’s Complaints Co-ordinator has **7 days** to make an initial decision about whether or not the complaint has grounds. If it is decided that the complaint has grounds then it will be investigated; an investigator then has **21 days** to complete his/her investigation. Should your case be deemed complex, an extension of an investigation may be required.

After the completion of the investigation, a complaints panel will hear the case, and has **18 days** to make a decision. You will receive a written response outlining the reasons for the decision and any actions to be taken.

If you do not agree with the decision, you have **7 days** to ask for a review.
Stage 3 - The Review Stage

If you do not accept the outcome at Stage 2, then you may be eligible to proceed to Stage 3. However, you cannot request a review of Stage 2 simply because you are dissatisfied with the outcome, you need to show a reason why a review should take place. Acceptable reasons (or grounds) are:

- that there exists evidence that could not reasonably have been made available at Stage 2;
- that there exists evidence of a material procedural irregularity in Stage 2;
- that there exists evidence that the judgement at Stage 2 was perverse or bias.

If you feel that you can meet one or more of the above grounds then you may request a Stage 3 Review.

How do I submit my request for a review?

You make a request for a review via The Complaints Procedure Stage 3 Review Application Form which can be found at:

https://lancasteruni.qualtrics.com/SE/?S1D=SV_7OFdPi2kI08Fhzy

Time Limit: You have 18 days from receiving the Stage 2 response to submit your online review form. This includes any time you may need to collect any further evidence according to the grounds on the previous page. If you require more time, and there are exceptional circumstances, this must be agreed with the Complaints Co-ordinator.
What happens next?

After you have submitted your application to request a review, the University Complaints Co-ordinator has 7 days to make an initial decision as to whether or not the Review has grounds. If the review does not have grounds then you will be informed via a COP letter. If the review does have grounds then a review panel will make a decision within 18 days to accept or deny the review. Either way this will be sent to you as a written response which will outline the reasons why the panel has reached its decisions. If the complaint has been accepted then any actions or solutions will be described in the written response, if applicable. After this a COP letter will be issued.

Taking a complaint further

If all the stages of the Complaints Procedure have been completed and you still feel dissatisfied with the outcome of your case, you can take the case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The application to the OIA must be made within 12 months of the issue of the Completion of Procedures letter after the conclusion of Stage 3. Information about the OIA and its processes can be found at the link below.

http://www.oiahe.org.uk/

Appearing before a panel

You should be aware that according to the procedure you are able to attend both the Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 panel meetings. It is not compulsory for you to attend either of the panel meetings, and failure to attend will not stop the proceedings of the panel.

For more information on exactly what happens at both the Stage 2 and 3 panel meetings please refer to the Complaints Procedure. This will give you a detailed description of what you may expect at each stage.
It is important for you to remember that a Students’ Union representative can attend the panel meetings to advise and support you if you wish.

A written record of the meeting will be produced and sent to you for your records. However if you wish to record the panel meetings you may do so, providing that all attendees of the meeting sign an agreement giving their permission to be recorded. You will also be responsible for providing any equipment needed to record the session.
Definitions

This section will briefly define some of the terms used throughout the procedure.

**Academic Appeal:** According to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, an appeal is defined as a ‘request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progress, assessment and awards’.

**Academic Judgement:** Academic judgement is a judgement that is made about a matter where only the opinion of an academic expert is sufficient.

**Boards of Examiners:** Responsible for commenting on the content, balance and structure of degrees and their component modules as well as academic achievements by individual students.

**Complaint:** According to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, a complaint is defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about a university’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the university’.

**Completion of Procedures letter (often referred to as a COP letter):** Once a student has exhausted the University’s internal academic appeals or complaints procedures, and there is no further avenue available to the student within the University, the University must promptly send a Completion of Procedures letter to the student. This letter should set out clearly what issues have been considered and the university’s final decision.

**Extenuating and mitigating circumstances:** Each university’s regulations will allow for extenuating or mitigating circumstances to be taken into account in a student’s assessment if those circumstances are made known to the university in a timely manner. It is for each university to determine what extenuating or mitigating circumstances are acceptable. However, they are, by definition, post hoc; that is they are only considered
after a submission deadline.

**Evidence & supporting documentation:** Items presented in support of the complaint. They may include correspondence, medical evidence, reports by professionals, financial information, coursework or examinations.

**Procedural irregularity:** A procedural irregularity is where the procedures and regulations of a university have not been complied with, giving rise to a complaint or academic appeal.

**Student:** The term ‘student’ includes those registered or enrolled on a course through the University. It includes those on an interruption of study, temporary withdrawal or temporary exclusion or suspension and those who have recently left a university.

**Student Experience:** The student experience refers to all aspects of a student’s interaction with the university, it goes beyond learning opportunities.

**Students’ Charter:** Articulates this relationship and the standards to which the University and its students aspire.
### Roles and Responsibilities

Below is an outline of the roles and responsibilities belonging to the Student Complaints Procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colleges and Student Experience Committee</strong></td>
<td>Responsible for recommending to the Council, via the Senate as appropriate, strategies and policies relating to the student experience and well-being in accordance with a schedule of delegations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complaints Co-ordinator</strong></td>
<td>Responsible for overseeing the Student Complaints Procedure and providing advice about procedure at any stage to all parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complaints Investigator</strong></td>
<td>Responsible for reviewing the evidence at Stage 2-The Formal Stage surrounding the complaint, including but not limited to that supplied by the student and/or staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complaints Panel (Stage 2)</strong></td>
<td>The body of the University from which persons are drawn to hear Stage 2-Formal Student Complaints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Council</strong></td>
<td>The governing body of the university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provost for Student Experience, Colleges and the Library</strong></td>
<td>Responsible for fostering good working relationships between the management of the University and the student body and leads development of the student experience at Lancaster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Review Panel (Stage 3)**

The body of the University from which persons are drawn to hear a Stage 3-Review.

**Senate**

The academic authority of the University and draws its membership from the academic and academic-related staff and the students of the institutions.

**Staff and or faculty or Professional/Student Services**

Employee of the University

**Standing Academic Committee**

Responsible for reviewing faculty/departmental recommendations regarding such issues as exclusion, plagiarism or examination malpractice.

**Students’ Union**

The Students' Union provide support and guidance to students through the complaints process.
Ownership of communication

Below is a table showing the responsibilities of both student and university to produce written communication. Please note that the preferred method of communication is electronic. NB: The table is not chronological.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Owner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1- Record of initial contact at local level.</td>
<td>Student to faculty/department/service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2-Formal Application Form</td>
<td>Student via online form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation/evidence in defence of initial complaint</td>
<td>To be provided by the relevant Faculty/Department/Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2-Prima Facie Decision</td>
<td>Complaints Co-ordinator to student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2-Response</td>
<td>Nominated Member of the Complaints Panel to student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3-Request for Review Application Form</td>
<td>Student to Complaints Co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3-Prima Facie Decision</td>
<td>Complaints Co-ordinator to student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3-Response</td>
<td>Nominated Member of the Review Panel to student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Procedures (COP) Letter</td>
<td>Complaints Co-ordinator to student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Event of Complaint

Student Submits Stage 2 Formal Complaints Form

- Student has **30 days** from event to submit online form

Complaints Coordinator makes initial decision

- Complaint has grounds
  - Complaint Investigator initiates investigation
  - Stage 2 Complaints Panel hears case
    - Complaint Upheld
    - Complaint Denied

- Student does not accept outcome
  - Student has **7 days** to accept decision
  - Student Submits Stage 3 Formal Review Form

Complaints Coordinator has **7 days** to make decision and inform student

Complaint Investigator has **21 days** to complete investigation

- COP letter issued
  - Review does not have grounds
    - Review has grounds
      - Stage 3 Review Panel hears case
        - Review Denied
        - Review Upheld

- COP letter issued
  - COP letter issued

Student has **18 days** from receiving Stage 2 decision to submit online review form. **NB:** This includes the **7 days** they have to accept decision.

Complaints Coordinator has **7 days** to make decision and inform student

Panel has **18 days** to hear case and inform student of decision

Complaints Investigator has **21 days** to complete investigation

Complaints Investigator initiates investigation

Stage 2 Complaints Panel hears case

- Panel has **18 days** to hear case and inform student of decision

COP letter issued

All COP letters issued within **7 days**

PROCEDURAL TIME CONSTRAINTS START HERE

PROCEDURAL TIME CONSTRAINTS END HERE
What advice and help is available?

This section will outline where advice and help can be found across the University.

Help is available to you throughout the whole process of making a complaint. Make sure you use the advice and help that is available to you; some useful sources of help and advice are listed below.

**Students’ Union**

The Students’ Union will be a major source of advice for most students as their advisor will be able to:

- Offer an explanation of how the process of making a complaint works, drawing from knowledge of the Complaints Procedure.
- Offer advice and help on how to prepare evidence and supporting documentation for your application forms.
- Offer support and representation for any panel meetings that a student may wish to attend.

We recommend that you get in touch with the Students’ Union through their pages on complaints and appeals at

https://lancastersu.co.uk/complaint

**Student Wellbeing Services**

It is also important to remember that help is offered through Student Wellbeing Services who may be able to help regarding issues that may affect students.

http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/sbs/wellbeing/index.html

**Colleges and the Advisory System**

Each College has an advisory/welfare system in place that aims to support students independently of their academic departments. The system that exists in your college may be able to help you with your complaint, for more information please contact your College.