

Complaints policy and procedure

Complaints about the OfS

The OfS is committed to hearing about things we may have got wrong and putting them right where we can. Our general approach to considering complaints about our work is set out in this policy. Complaints are considered by our complaints team, which operates separately from the teams that may be subject to a complaint.

Things our complaints team can deal with

Our complaints team can deal with complaints from anyone directly affected by our work, including complaints about our staff or people working for us. You can complain if you think we have behaved in an unprofessional way or handled our contact with you inappropriately.

Things our complaints team can't deal with

Our complaints team can't deal with complaints about:

- Matters that are within the remit of a different complaints or review process. These are described in full in the next section ('things we can deal with through other routes'), and include:
 - Challenges to our regulatory decisions (including registration or degree awarding powers, risk assessments for a registered provider or its compliance with conditions of registration, and funding allocations), or the process we have followed to reach those decisions.
 - Information rights requests and data protection complaints.
- Disputes between individual students or groups of students and their higher education provider. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) considers and resolves those disputes. Separately, we are interested in hearing from students who want to give us information about their higher education provider through our [notifications process](#).
- Matters that we have already considered and resolved as part of a previous complaint. If a new complaint is substantially similar to a previous complaint, we will take into account our previous work in responding.
- Matters we judge to be outside our remit.

Things we can deal with through other routes

Where our complaints team can't deal with a complaint, this may be because there are other more appropriate routes for us to consider things we may have got wrong:

- We have published in our regulatory framework and associated guidance documents the routes for providers to challenge our regulatory decisions, or the process we have followed to reach those decisions.
- We have published separately:
 - Our approach to considering requests for an internal review of our response to an information rights request, for example a Freedom of Information request.
 - Our data protection complaints procedure.
- Where a matter has become the subject of legal proceedings we will not separately consider a complaint about those issues.
- Where a complaint is being dealt with by another organisation, for example the National Audit Office, we will not separately consider a complaint about those issues. We may respond to requests to share information to assist another organisation in considering a complaint, where we have the powers to do so.

How to make a complaint

If you want to make a complaint, please contact us as soon as possible, normally within 30 calendar days of the event you want to complain about.

You need to tell us:

- What happened and when.
- How it has affected you.
- What you would like us to do.
- Your name and contact details – we can't consider anonymous complaints.

You also need to send us any relevant supporting evidence.

You can email this information to complaints@officeforstudents.org.uk or write to:

Corporate Governance Team (Complaints)
 Office for Students
 Westward House
 Lime Kiln Close
 Stoke Gifford
 BRISTOL
 BS34 8SR

What happens after you've complained

Our complaints team will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within seven calendar days. We will decide whether the complaint falls within the scope of our complaints policy. If it does, a member of staff who was not involved in the issues leading to the complaint will review your

complaint. The reviewer may discuss your complaint with anyone connected with it to establish relevant facts.

Our complaints team will write to you within 30 calendar days to let you know the outcome of our review of your complaint. Our complaints process follows, and is subject to, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's Principles of Good Complaint Handling.

Our standards for handling complaints

We commit to:

- Considering and responding to complaints fairly, effectively and courteously without prejudice.
- Dealing with complaints promptly – if we can't meet our published timescales, we tell you and keep you informed about progress.
- Giving clear reasons for our decisions about your complaint.
- Using the experience and knowledge we gain from considering complaints to improve the way we work and our performance.
- Acting fairly towards our staff as well as those making complaints – we will tell members of staff that they have been complained about and, where appropriate, give them an opportunity to respond.

If you're not satisfied with our response

If you're not happy with the outcome of your complaint, you can contact the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) through your Member of Parliament.

Vexatious and unreasonably persistent complaints

Occasionally, we receive complaints that are vexatious or unreasonably persistent, or otherwise made in bad faith. Such a complaint would be likely to prevent the OfS from carrying out its business. We would consider a complaint to be vexatious or unreasonably persistent if it is, in our view, unfounded, unreasonable or trivial and made with the intention of wasting the OfS's time and resources, or would have that effect.

We will not respond to complaints that have an improper purpose or effect, such as harassment of the OfS or its staff, or repeated requests that take up a disproportionate amount of time and resources. On the rare occasions this happens, we may need to restrict or discontinue contact with a complainant.

Confidentiality

We will treat complaints in confidence and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and any subsequent data protection legislation, and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The OfS is a data controller for the purposes of data protection legislation. We hold and process data in accordance with the principles set out in data protection legislation.

We will keep records of the complaints we receive to make sure that we are considering and responding to them efficiently and effectively.