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**Complaints Policy & Procedure**

**1.0 Policy Statement**

* 1. Edge Hill Students’ Union is committed to providing services of the highest

standard, however we recognise that on occasion you may feel we have not met our specified standards and that you have legitimate cause for complaint. We regard feedback, both negative and positive, as a valuable resource to help us improve the quality of our services and provision.

1.2 The procedure sets out the steps we will take when we receive a

complaint from users of the service, an organisation or member of the

public. It does not address complaints made by staff or volunteers (dealt

with through grievance and disciplinary procedures), nor job applicants

(recruitment procedure), nor requests for new or different services or provisions.

1.3 The procedure seeks to be simple, clear, and fair to all parties involved. It is based on the belief that complaints should be dealt with seriously and should be investigated promptly and dealt with as closely as possible to their origins. For this reason, all complainants are requested to try to resolve the issue as informally as possible in the first instance with the relevant department or service area. The intention is that most issues can be effectively handled locally, in a spirit of conciliation. Thus, the formal complaints procedure should be a last resort in the search for a solution.

1. **What is a complaint?**

2.1 A complaint covers any expression of dissatisfaction or concern about:

* standards of service, or facilities provided by the Students’ Union
* actions by Edge Hill Students’ Union, its staff, or officers
	1. A complaint is more than negative criticism or any objection to the merits of any decision or action taken by the Students’ Union. It is a specific concern that requires a response from the Students’ Union.

**3.0 Who can complain?**

3.1 This procedure is for use by any student or prospective student, who seeks or receives a service from Edge Hill Students’ Union or any person who is directly affected by the activities of Edge Hill Students’ Union. Complaints are usually made by individual students or by groups of students.

3.2 A person’s capacity to make a complaint only exists in relation to issues which affect their interests, therefore, a person does not have the authority to make a complaint on behalf of others. Complaints may not be lodged by a representative, a parent or any other third party. Complaints made by groups of students must therefore be confirmed and signed by all parties.

**4.0 Guidelines for making and handling complaints**

4.1 As a general principle, the Students’ Union seeks to respond to complaints in an open and constructive manner and in accordance with the principles of natural justice.

To this end, the Students’ Union will:

* ensure all parties to a complaint are advised on what to expect during the complaint handling process
* carry out the complaint handling process in a transparent way, ensuring that all parties involved in the complaint have access to any allegations and evidence presented
* provide all parties with the opportunity to participate in the process
* treat all parties in a respectful manner
* not discriminate or act against any individual making a complaint, unless it is found to be malicious or vexatious
* provide reasons for any decisions made

4.2 All complaints will be taken seriously and as far as is reasonable, be treated in a consistent fashion throughout the Students’ Union. The same issue will not be dealt with under more than one internal process at the same time. Wherever possible, the concern(s) raised will be dealt with in totality through the investigation process.

In line with our equality and diversity policy, all complainants will be treated equally and those who make complaints will not suffer any disadvantage or recrimination because of making a complaint. Only where complaints are proven to be malicious or vexatious may there be any recourse to disciplinary investigation and possible sanction against the complainant.

4.3 Generally, complaints which are made more than 3 months after the incident or action being complained about, will not be investigated.

**5.0 Confidentiality**

5.1 All complaints will be handled sensitively and with due consideration to confidentiality. Any person named in a complaint, however, will be informed of the complaint, supplied with a copy of the complaint and any evidence in relation to it and be informed of the outcome. They will also have a right of reply as part of the investigative process.

**6.0 Anonymous complaints**

6.1 All complaints require investigation. Where anonymous complaints are made it is not normally possible to investigate the complaint. For this reason, anonymous complaints will not normally result in action under this procedure.

**7.0 Third party complaints**

7.1 Complaints must be made by complainants themselves and not by others acting on their behalf.

**8.0 Collective complaints**

8.1 If a group of complainants make a collective complaint about the same issue, each person will receive an individual acknowledgement and response letter. Each person will also be asked independently to confirm that they are happy to sign up to the complaint. If any meetings are deemed necessary to investigate the complaint, only one meeting, to which all complainants will be invited, will be held.

**9.0 Accompaniment at any stage**

9.1 Complainants wishing to make a complaint at any stage have the right to be accompanied. If hearings are arranged to consider complaints, any person asked to attend such a hearing has a right to be accompanied by a person of their choosing. Individuals are asked however to notify the Students’ Union whom they wish to attend in advance of the meeting.

**10.0 Help, support, and representation**

10.1 Support and guidance on procedures and representation are available from the Students’ Union and we can provide general and specific support as requested. It is however the complainant’s responsibility to seek advice and support where necessary.

**11.0 Remedy or redress**

11.1 If a complaint is upheld at any stage, Edge Hill Students’ Union will seek to take such action as may be appropriate. If a complaint is not found to be justified at any stage, Edge Hill Students’ Union will communicate this to the complainant, giving reasons for the decision that the complaint was unfounded.

**12.0 Reimbursement of expenses**

12.1 If a complaint is upheld, Edge Hill Students’ Union will meet any reasonable ‘out of pocket’ expenses connected with the formal stage of the procedure. This may include travel and subsistence costs incurred in connection with the person’s attendance at a complaint hearing. Any legitimate expenses will only be paid out on production of valid receipts.

**13.0 Recording of complaints**

13.1 Records of any correspondence or investigation of the complaint will be kept throughout the procedure under confidential cover and destroyed in line with the Students’ Union guidelines on the handling and storage of confidential information.

**14.0 Time limits**

14.1 Staff will make every effort to keep to the time limits set out in this procedure. However, where, for good reason, this is not possible, the complainant will be kept informed of progress.

**15.0 How, where, when and to whom to complain?**

15.1 **Stage 1 (The Informal Stage):**

Stakeholders of Edge Hill Students’ Union are encouraged to raise any issues at an early stage and to discuss the matter with the person concerned. Many apparent concerns result from misunderstandings, which can often be quickly resolved by talking through the matter.

15.2 You can either:

* Ring the appropriate person
* Call in and see the appropriate person, but please make sure you make an appointment in the interests of all concerned
* Write a letter or email to the appropriate person

15.3 Informal complaints should normally be responded to within 5 working days of receipt of complaint. The informal stage will frequently be an oral process and records of such complaints will not normally be retained or recorded centrally, unless the complainant and the member of staff dealing with it wish to do so. If this is the case, a complaints form should be completed and used in the normal way.

16.0 **Stage 2 (The Formal Stage)**

16.1 A complaint that cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally may then be submitted formally. Complaints must be made within 3 months after the incident or action being complained about. You should complete a Complaints Form and email it to sucomms@edgehill.ac.uk, who will forward it to the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive will either investigate themselves or delegate responsibility to a member of staff of appropriate standing and background to undertake the investigation on his or her behalf. This person will be independent of the complaint itself.

16.2 The Chief Executive or designated alternate will:

* Provide a written acknowledgement of the complaint (an email is sufficient).
* Inform any stakeholder concerned that a complaint has been submitted and provide them with a copy of the complaint.
* Review the complaint and decide whether to call a meeting to discuss the complaint with you and any other named party within the complaint.
* Investigate the complaint.
* Attempt to deal with the complaint and resolve it.
* Provide a written response to the complainant outlining whether the complaint is upheld or dismissed. In cases where there is also a respondent, this information will also be shared with the respondent.

16.3 Written responses to complaints will be given within a reasonable time, normally no longer than 10 working days.

16.4 A copy of the complaints form [**can be found here.**](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeKkCI6hW6BneTlLrcjqHzspoe4XQhdVEvm-NfomP63sNGA5g/viewform?usp=sf_link)

17.0 **Edge Hill Students’ Union will:**

* handle your complaint in a quick, polite, and straightforward way
* investigate your complaint thoroughly
* inform you of when you can expect a reply if one cannot be given in the first instance
* keep you up to date on progress.

17.1 In all cases of complaint, Edge Hill Students’ Union seeks to ensure that appropriate and reasonable action is taken.

18.0 **Learning from your complaint**

18.1 In order that Edge Hill Students’ Union can learn from your complaints, it will keep accurate and complete records of any complaints received and any resulting correspondence, interviews, and interactions. Edge Hill Students’ Union will then prepare an annual report on complaints received and their resolution.

18.2 This will help us to improve customer service throughout Edge Hill Students’ Union and monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.