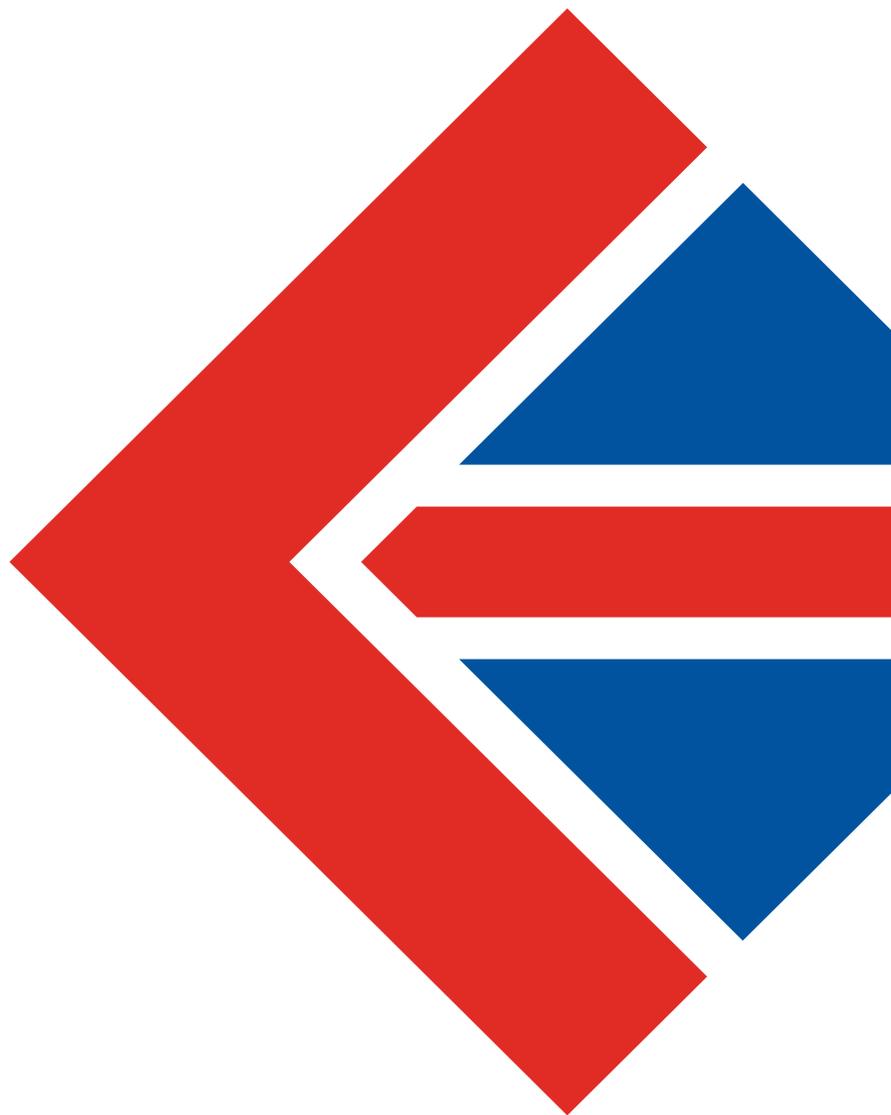


STUDENT COMPLAINTS' PROCEDURE

Information for English UK members

October 2015



Complaints against English UK member centres

This document outlines how English UK handles complaints against its language centre members.

Background

Around 400,000 students a year attend English language courses at English UK member schools, universities or colleges. We receive about 35 complaints a year and of these about three or four cases are referred to the independent Ombudsman for a judgement.

Members of English UK are all accredited by the Accreditation UK scheme, which we run jointly with the British Council. Members must maintain the standards required by the Accreditation Scheme at all times. The criteria for the Accreditation Scheme can be found on the British Council website (see www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation-students.htm).

We take all complaints seriously and facilitate communication between the complainant and the member centre in order to resolve the complaint.

Process

The process used for handling a complaint depends upon the type of institution – please refer to the appropriate section below:

1. Complaints against private sector schools
2. Complaints against universities/higher education institutions
3. Complaints against further education colleges

1. Complaints against private sector schools

Every member school has an internal complaints process. We cannot accept a complaint until it has gone through the school's own process. Before contacting English UK, students should first discuss their complaint with the Principal or an appropriate member of staff (for example, the Director of Studies, Accommodation Officer, or Student Counsellor).

In order to make a complaint, students must write in English to English UK via info@englishuk.com.

We cannot accept complaints over the telephone because we need a record of the complaint in case it has to be referred to the Ombudsman.

We can only deal with complaints from international students on an English language course at a member school. We cannot accept complaints:

- from teachers or other staff, agents or host families about problems with schools;
- from people unwilling to give their names;
- about courses such as computing or business studies, or work experience placements, even if these are at member schools; OR,
- about schools which are not full members of English UK.

Unless there are exceptional reasons, we will not normally consider complaints about a course that has ended more than six months ago.

We can only accept complaints made on behalf of a student if it is made by a close family member (parents, brother/sister, uncle or aunt) and if the student has given written authorisation for the family member to pursue the complaint.

When English UK receives a complaint, we write to the complainant to inform them that we have received it, and at the same time we will write to the school concerned to ask for a response within three weeks. We will reply to the complainant based on this response and ask for a response from them within three weeks. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, we will close a complaint case if we do not receive a response from the complainant within three weeks.

If the student is still not satisfied with your response, we will refer the complaint to the independent Ombudsman. We will send him/ her all the letters on the case, and s/he can ask to see any other documents that s/he thinks may be helpful. S/he can also ask questions of the school or the complainant, or anyone else, in order to come to a view on the case. S/he will give the decision in writing. This report will be sent to the centre and the complainant. This judgement is binding on the school: it must do what the Ombudsman says. The Ombudsman will take up to 6 weeks to come to a decision.

This process is intended to be a relatively fast and cost free way for students to have their complaint heard. Please note that taking the case to the Ombudsman does not affect the complainant's right to take legal action subsequently if they wish to do so.

Once the Ombudsman has given his/ her judgement and any required action has been carried out, the English UK complaints process is at an end. The Ombudsman will not engage in subsequent correspondence with either the school or the student, and English UK will regard the Ombudsman's judgement as final.

Please note: if the Ombudsman rules that a refund should be made to the complainant we will contact the student to ask for their bank account details and pass them on to the school. The school will have two weeks to transfer the money.

If the student decides at any point in the process to start legal proceedings against the member centre, English UK will suspend its consideration of the complaint until the legal proceedings are complete so that no comment by us should prove prejudicial to the legal proceedings.

Please note that a failure to comply with this process could result in the termination of English UK membership.

2. Complaints against universities/higher education institutions

Students should first discuss their complaint with their course tutor and then follow the internal complaints procedure of your higher education institution. If the student has exhausted the internal complaints procedure and feels that their complaint has not been satisfactorily dealt with, they may have the option of taking their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

Please visit their website www.oiahe.org.uk for further information or contact them at:

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
Second Floor, Abbey Gate
57–75 Kings Road
Reading RG1 3AB

Or email: enquiries@oiahe.org.uk

3. Complaints against further education colleges

Students should first register their complaint within the college's internal complaints process. If they then feel that the complaint has still not been resolved to their satisfaction, and it is regarding an English language course leading to an external qualification, they can take it forward to the relevant Examination Board or qualifications awarding body.

If their concerns are about other non-academic matters, they may be able to complain to the Skills Funding Agency. Please visit their website www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk for additional information.



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