

Student Complaints – Information for members

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Complaints against English UK member centres

This document outlines how English UK handles complaints against its member centres.

Background

Over 400,000 students a year attend English language courses at English UK member centres. We receive about 35 complaints a year and of these about 3 or 4 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](#).

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

Process

Every member centre has an internal complaints process. We cannot accept a complaint until it has gone through the centre'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 centre. We cannot accept complaints:

- from teachers or other staff, agents (unless in relation to a group) or homestay hosts about problems with their centres;
- 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 centres 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 6 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.

Complaints from agents on behalf of a group

We can accept complaints from agents on behalf of a group if the following circumstances are met:

- The complaint refers to an aspect or aspects of the group's experience at the language centre - e.g. accommodation, tuition, transport, activities. Other types of complaint, such as those relating to visa refunds, would need to be raised by the individual(s) affected
- The agent would need to identify those members of the group (only) who wish to raise the complaint and must obtain written permission from those students or their parents/next of kin to raise the complaint on their behalf
- The agent can only ask for compensation for the students affected and cannot propose some other form of resolution such as a discounted course for another student or group

We reserve the right to ask for individual complaints – e.g. if the group members' complaints are too diverse to be treated meaningfully as a whole.

Receiving 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 centre 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 centre 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 centre: 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 centre 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 centre. The centre 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.

Complaints against universities/higher education institutions

Once a student has exhausted the internal complaints procedure and they do not consider that the complaint has been satisfactorily dealt with, they have the option of taking their complaint either to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education or to English UK.

N.B. English UK can only accept a complaint if it relates to an accredited English language course.

Complaints against further education colleges

Once a student has exhausted the internal complaints procedure and they do not consider that the complaint has been satisfactorily dealt with, they have the option of taking their complaint either to the Education and Skills Funding Agency or to English UK.

N.B. English UK can only accept a complaint if it relates to an accredited English language course.