

RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION COMPLAINTS GUIDE

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Accommodation Code**

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide sets out the process for raising concerns or making a complaint about university-owned student residential accommodation. Its purpose is to ensure that all students living in our residences understand:

1.1 Your right to raise concerns

Every resident has the right to express dissatisfaction about the accommodation, the services provided, or the behaviour of those involved in delivering or supporting residential life. This guide ensures that your concerns are taken seriously, handled fairly, and addressed promptly.

1.2 What the University Aims to Achieve

Our accommodation services aim to provide safe, comfortable, and well-managed living environments. When something goes wrong, we want to:

- identify the issue quickly,
- resolve it effectively, and
- learn from it to improve the experience for current and future residents.

We recognise that feedback—positive or negative—is valuable for shaping better services.

1.3 What this guide covers

This document explains:

- the types of issues you can complain about,
- the steps involved in informal and formal complaints,
- how long each stage should take,
- what outcomes you can expect,
- where to get support or advice, and
- how you can appeal a decision if you feel it has not addressed your concerns.

1.4 What you can expect from us

By following this guide, you can expect:

- Transparency – clear communication at each stage of the process.
- Fairness – your complaint will be considered objectively and without prejudice.
- Respect – all interactions will be conducted professionally and sensitively.
- Confidentiality – information will only be shared with those directly involved in resolving the issue.
- Consistency – all complaints will be handled using the same standards and procedures.

1.5 When and how to use this guide

This guide is for all students living in university-owned accommodation, whether undergraduate, postgraduate, UK-based, international.

Use this guide whenever you experience an issue that cannot be resolved through normal day-to-day communication or when a matter is serious enough to require formal attention.

2.0 WHAT YOU CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT ABOUT

You can make a complaint about any issue relating to your accommodation or the way services are delivered, including:

2.1 Accommodation related issues

- Repairs and maintenance delays
- Cleanliness of communal areas
- Heating, hot water, or utilities
- Noise or disruption
- Pest problems

2.2 Service and Staff related issues

- Behaviour or conduct of university staff or contractors
- Quality of support or communication
- Handling of previous requests or incidents

2.3 Behaviour of other residents

- Noise or antisocial behaviour
- Breaches of accommodation agreements
- Harassment, bullying, or unsafe conduct

Complaints outside University accommodation must be referred direct to the Student Complaints Office, even if you live in university Accommodation

If an issue involves immediate risk to health or safety, report it urgently through the residence emergency contact or security team rather than using the complaints procedure.

3.0 INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

Many concerns can be resolved quickly and effectively without needing to enter the formal complaints process. We encourage residents to take the steps below in the first instance, as informal resolution often leads to faster outcomes, clearer communication, and a better overall experience.

3.1 Why Start Informally

Informal resolution is designed to:

- address issues as soon as they arise,
- reduce unnecessary escalation,
- allow staff to correct mistakes or misunderstandings quickly, and
- ensure simple matters do not become lengthy or stressful.

Most day-to-day concerns—such as minor maintenance issues, noise problems, or communication difficulties—are best resolved informally and usually within a short timeframe.

3.2 Speaking to the Right Person

Depending on the nature of the issue, you can approach:

- Residence Manager or Assistant Residence Manager – for issues relating to building management, maintenance, cleaning, or staff conduct;
- Residential Life Team or Warden – for behavioural issues involving other residents, wellbeing concerns, or community matters;
- Reception or Accommodation Office – for administrative queries, key/access issues, or general questions about your accommodation.

If you are unsure who to contact, any member of accommodation staff can direct your concern to the appropriate team.

3.3 How to raise an Informal Concern

You may raise your concern:

- by email accommodation @tees.ac.uk
- through the accommodation reception or helpdesk.

When doing so, it is helpful to provide:

- a short description of the issue,
- when it first occurred,
- how it has affected you, and
- any steps you have already taken (e.g., speaking to neighbours, submitting a maintenance request).

This information helps staff understand the issue quickly and respond more effectively

A complaint must be received within 8 weeks of the event or lack of action.

3.4 Early Resolution

A senior member of the accommodation team will be assigned to review your complaint. They will and gather evidence or relevant information with the aim of resolving without the need of a formal process

Early resolution focuses on addressing concerns quickly and informally, often at the point they arise, to prevent issues from escalating or becoming more disruptive. When a resident raises a concern, staff will listen carefully, gather basic information, and work collaboratively with the student to identify a practical and proportionate solution. This may involve clarifying misunderstandings, arranging minor repairs, speaking with other residents, or offering guidance on available support. Early resolution is intended to be straightforward and responsive, with actions typically completed within a few working days. The emphasis is on swift communication, problem-solving, and restoring a positive living experience without the need for a formal investigation.

Examples of early resolution steps include:

- Submitting or prioritising a maintenance request when a resident reports a repair that has not yet been logged.
- Reminding a flat or corridor group about noise expectations after a student raises concerns about late-night disruption.
- Mediating an informal conversation between residents experiencing a minor disagreement.
- Clarifying policy or contract terms, for example around guests or cleaning responsibilities, if a misunderstanding has caused frustration.
- Providing advice or signposting to wellbeing, Residential Life, or Students' Union support services.
- Following up with contractors or cleaning teams to ensure scheduled tasks are completed promptly.
- Checking in with the resident after an action has been taken to confirm the issue is resolved to their satisfaction.

3.5 Expected Time frames

Staff aim to resolve informal concerns within 10 working days, depending on the complexity of the issue. You will be informed of:

- what action is being taken,
- when you can expect an update, and
- whether any follow-up is required.

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, or if a longer investigation is needed, you will be advised to use the formal complaints procedure.

3.6 Situations where you can bypass the informal stage

You do *not* need to attempt informal resolution if:

- the issue is serious (e.g., harassment, discrimination, staff misconduct, safety risks),
- you feel uncomfortable raising it directly with staff,
- informal attempts have already failed, or
- the matter requires formal documentation or investigation.

In these cases, you may submit a formal complaint immediately

3.7 Support during the informal stage

If you would like help raising an informal concern, you can seek assistance from:

- Accommodation Team
- the Students' Union Advice Centre,
- Wellbeing Adviser, or
- international or disability support teams.

These services can provide guidance, help you frame your concern clearly, and support you in approaching staff.

4.0 HOW TO MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT

If your concern is not resolved informally or is too serious for informal resolution, you may submit a formal complaint.

4.1 How to submit a complaint

You can submit a complaint by:

- Emailing the Accommodation Office.
Accommodation@tees.ac.uk

Formal complaints will be reviewed and passed onto the Student Complaints office if required if they can not be resolved by early resolution.

4.2 What to include.

To help us process your complaint promptly, include:

- Your name and student ID
- Accommodation address
- A clear description of the issue
- What steps you have already taken (if any)
- Dates, times, and evidence (e.g., photos, emails, noise logs)
- What outcome you are seeking

You will receive a written acknowledge your complaint within 24hrs (excluding bank holidays, weekends and official university holidays)

4.3 Support during the formal stage

If you would like help raising an informal concern, you can seek assistance from:

- Accommodation Team
- the Students' Union Advice Centre,
- Wellbeing Adviser, or
- international or disability support teams.

These services can provide guidance, help you frame your concern clearly, and support you in approaching staff.

5.0 THE INVESTIGATION

Once a complaint has been submitted, the university will carry out a fair, transparent, and timely investigation. This process aims to establish the facts, understand the issues raised, and determine an appropriate outcome.

5.1 Assigning an Investigating Officer

Your complaint will be allocated to an Investigating Officer, typically a senior member of Accommodation Services who has not previously been involved in your case. Their role is to:

- review all the information you have provided,
- gather additional evidence where necessary, and
- ensure your complaint is handled impartially and professionally.

You will be informed who will be handling your case.

5.2 Acknowledgement and Initial Review

Within 24 hrs (excluding bank holidays, weekends and official university closure days), you will receive written acknowledgement of your complaint.

During the initial review, the Investigating Officer will:

- confirm whether your complaint falls within the scope of the accommodation complaints procedure,
- identify the key issues raised,
- decide what information or evidence is needed, and
- outline the expected timescales for the investigation.

If any part of your complaint falls under a different university policy (e.g., harassment, safeguarding, student conduct), you will be advised of next steps and signposted appropriately.

5.3 Gathering Evidence

The Investigating Officer may gather information from several sources, which can include:

- Your written statement and supporting evidence (photos, screenshots, correspondence, noise logs, etc.)
- Maintenance or facilities records
- Staff accounts, including wardens, residence managers, security, or contractors
- Statements from other students or witnesses, where relevant
- CCTV footage (where available and appropriately requested under policy)
- Incident reports, work orders, or health and safety documentation

All evidence is handled confidentially and in accordance with data protection regulations.

5.4 Meetings or Discussions

You may be invited to meet (in person or online) with the Investigating Officer to:

- clarify details of your complaint,
- give additional context, or
- respond to new information.

You may bring a representative or support person (e.g., Students' Union advisor) to any meeting.

If meetings are not possible, questions may be sent to you in writing.

5.5 Timescales

The university aims to conclude the investigation and provide a written response within 15 working days of acknowledging your complaint.

If the complaint is complex or requires specialist input, the Investigating Officer may extend this timeframe.

In such cases, you will receive:

- a clear explanation for the delay,
- an updated timeline, and
- assurance that the investigation is ongoing.

5.6 Decision-Making Process for formal complaints

Once all evidence has been gathered, the Investigating Officer will:

- assess the facts objectively,
- consider the balance of evidence,
- determine whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld, and
- propose appropriate actions or remedies.

Their findings will be reviewed by a senior member of the Accommodation Services team to ensure fairness and consistency.

5.7 Communicating the Outcome

You will receive a formal written outcome that includes:

- a summary of your complaint,
- the steps taken during the investigation,
- the evidence considered,
- the decision and reasons for it,
- explanations of any actions the university will take, and
- information about your right to appeal.

Where appropriate, actions may begin before the final letter is sent (e.g., repairs, mediation arrangements, behaviour warnings).

5.8 After the Investigation

If your complaint highlights an issue that affects other residents or indicates a wider service problem, the university may:

- review operational procedures,
- offer additional staff training,
- revise policies, or
- implement measures to prevent recurrence.

6.0 NEXT STEPS

6.1 Informal Complaint

If your complaint has not been resolved under the early resolution process, you can redirect your complaint to the Student Casework office under the stage 1 Formal Complaints process.

Your complaint will then be dealt with during the University Students Complaints Policy.

6.2 Formal Complaints

In accordance with the University Students Complaints Policy if you are dissatisfied with how your complaint was handled you may request a review. This process is outlined in the Students Complaints Policy

6.3 Appeal

If you remain unhappy after this final stage, you may be able to take your case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) (UK universities), provided the issue falls within their remit.

7.0 CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

The university is committed to handling all complaints in a manner that is fair, sensitive, and respectful of your privacy. This section explains how your information will be used, who it may be shared with, and how it is protected throughout the complaints process.

- Your complaint will be handled sensitively and confidentially.
- Information will only be shared with staff directly involved in resolving the issue.
- Complaints are stored securely in line with data protection regulations.

8.0 YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A RESIDENT

Living in university-owned accommodation is a shared community experience. To ensure a safe, respectful and well-managed living environment for everyone, residents have a number of responsibilities. Fulfilling these expectations helps staff respond to issues effectively and supports a positive, fair complaints process.

- Providing Accurate and Helpful Information
- Engaging with Staff and the Investigation Process
- Treating Staff and Other Residents with Respect
- Following Accommodation Policies and Agreements
- Using University Services Appropriately
- Reporting Issues Promptly
- Respecting Confidentiality
- Behaving in a Way That Supports a Positive Community

9.0 THE UUK/GUILDHE UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION CODE

The University are part of the UUK / GuildHE Accommodation Code

The UUK/GuildHE Code of Practice sets out the standards universities must meet for student accommodation.

It does not investigate individual complaints but ensures that universities have proper complaints systems in place.

It monitors how complaints are handled and works with ombudsmen to spot problems and improve things across the sector.

Universities must report serious complaints to the Code, so the system keeps improving for everyone.

If you raise a complaint directly with The Code, The Code will refer you to the relevant member's complaints process.

The University will submit an annual anonymised return to the Code outline all complaints which have reached Stage 2 and 3 under the university Students Complaints Process.

The Accommodation team will keep a log of all complaints received through the accommodation office.

More information on the Code can be found at www.TheSAC.org