SHOCKOUT

Student Complaints Policy and Procedure 2025-2026

1. Purpose

Shockout aims to provide high quality academic and professional services. This Procedure sets out how students can raise concerns/complaints and how these will be considered fairly, promptly, and transparently.

2. Scope

2.1 This Procedure applies to:

- All students currently registered with Shockout; and
- Individuals who have **recently completed** their studies, provided the complaint is raised **within 20 working days** of completion

2.2 Complaints may concern any **academic or non academic** service provided by Shockout **except** matters listed in 2.5 and 2.6.

2.3 **No detriment:** Students will **not** be treated less favourably for raising a complaint in good faith.

2.4 **General matters:** Some general or collective concerns may be better raised via the **Student–Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC)**. The Student Support Team (SST) can advise which route is most appropriate.

2.5 **Normally excluded from this Procedure:** Complaints that:

- Have already been investigated and concluded;
- Fall outside scope;
- Lack adequate grounds or evidence;
- Have been disposed of in court/tribunal or settled by agreement;
- Are malicious, vexatious, frivolous, repetitive, harassing or non -meritorious;
- Seek outcomes that are unreasonable;
- Are submitted **outside the time limits**.

2.6 **Matters handled under other procedures (not this Procedure):**

- Examination/assessment performance or **academic judgement** (see **Academic Appeals Procedure**).
- Appeals against Assessment Board decisions (see **Academic Appeals Procedure**).

- Staff grievances.
- Freedom of Information or Data Protection matters.
- Issues covered by the **Freedom of Speech Policy**.
- Admissions complaints (taught or research).
- Student conduct/competency (see **Student Non Academic Disciplinary & Conduct Policy** and **Fitness to Practise Procedure**).
- DBS related matters.
- Matters subject to **ongoing** criminal/legal proceedings (until concluded).
- Issues already being considered under other procedures (e.g., **Fitness to Practise**, **Academic Misconduct**, **Academic Appeals**).

2.7 **Anonymous complaints:** Will not normally be accepted. Exceptionally, Shockout may investigate where there is a compelling, **evidence based** case. Students should note anonymity can limit investigation and feedback.

2.8 **Third party complaints:** Normally not accepted (including from parents/guardians/friends). A student may authorise a third party to act on their behalf using the **Third Party Consent Form** (Appendix B1).

2.9 **Group complaints:** Multiple students may bring a collective complaint where:

- A **lead student** is nominated; and
- All participating students give written consent via the **Group Complaint Consent Form** at **each stage** (Appendix B2).

2.10 **Fairness to all parties:** Individuals subject to a complaint normally have the right to know the substance of the allegation(s) and the identity of the complainant(s), to respond, and to access support/representation. Shockout discloses information only to those who need it for investigation/resolution. Where a complaint is about another student or a staff member, details of any subsequent **disciplinary action** may not be shared with the complainant for data protection reasons.

3. Definition of a Complaint

An **expression of dissatisfaction** by one or more students about Shockout's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of Shockout.

4. Complaints vs. Academic Appeals

An **Academic Appeal** is a request to review a decision of an **Assessment Board** on progression, assessment or award. This Procedure **cannot** change an Assessment Board decision. See the **Academic Appeals Procedure**.

5. Overview of Stages

This Procedure has **three stages**:

1. **Stage 1 – Early Resolution (Informal)**
2. **Stage 2 – Formal Stage**
3. **Stage 3 – Review Stage**

A summary of **time limits** appears in 7 and the **timeline table** (7.5).

6. Student Responsibilities

To enable timely, fair resolution students should:

1. Raise concerns **promptly** at Stage 1 with the person responsible day to day for the matter (e.g., Module Tutor, Programme Leader, Personal Tutor, or relevant Professional Service).
2. Provide clear, concise details and **supporting evidence** within stated deadlines.
3. Engage constructively with investigators and meetings.
4. Suggest reasonable remedies/outcomes in the Stage 2 form.
5. Be mindful of sensitivities where issues involve other students or staff.
6. Raise complaints only where a genuine issue has arisen—repeated unfounded complaints may amount to harassment.

Who can help: Programme Leaders, Personal Tutors, the **Student Support Team**, and (where applicable) **University of Bolton Student Support**.

7. The Procedure in Detail

7.1 Stage 1 – Early Resolution (Informal)

Time limit to raise: within **20 working days** of the event (or of the most recent event in a series).
How: Contact the relevant staff member responsible for the matter. They may consult their **Head of School/Division/Professional Service** to confirm remit or redirect as appropriate.
Outcome: A written response is normally provided **within 10 working days** of the concern being received, and in any case the student will be advised how to escalate to Stage 2 if dissatisfied.
Recording: Schools/Divisions/Professional Services should keep an internal record of Stage 1 concerns for trend monitoring.

7.2 Stage 2 – Formal Stage

Eligibility to proceed: Normally after Stage 1. In **exceptional** cases (e.g., complex matters), students may go directly to Stage 2 following advice from **senior management.**

Submission: Complete the **Stage 2 Formal Complaint Form** (Appendix C2) and email to **complaints@weareshockout.com** with all relevant evidence (e.g., correspondence, signed witness statements, documents).
Time limits:

- **10 working days** from the Stage 1 outcome to submit Stage 2; or
- If proceeding directly to Stage 2, within **20 working days** of the event/most recent event.

Initial checks by senior management:

- Within scope of this Procedure?
- Within deadlines?
- Was Stage 1 attempted (or reasonably bypassed)?
- Is the complaint clearly articulated and evidenced?
- Is mediation appropriate?
  If out of scope, the student will be notified in writing (with a **Completion of Procedures** letter).

Investigation: The relevant **Head of School/Division/Professional Service** appoints an **Investigating Officer** unconnected to the case (normally a senior staff member, at or above the level of anyone subject to complaint). The Investigating Officer will meet/communicate with the student and relevant parties, gather evidence, and produce an **Investigating Officer's Report** (Appendix C1).

Timescale: Investigation normally completed within **30 working days** of appointment. If delayed, the student will be informed.

Outcome: The Head issues a **Stage 2 Outcome Letter** stating whether the complaint is **upheld**, **partially upheld**, or **not upheld**, with reasons. A redacted copy of the Investigating Officer's Report will be provided. The complete complaint file is shared with the SEO for quality monitoring.

7.3 Stage 3 – Review Stage

Grounds for review (one or more):
A. **Procedural irregularity** at Stage 2 that materially disadvantaged the student;
B. **New, relevant evidence** which for good reason was not available at Stage 2;
C. The Stage 2 outcome was **unreasonable** (i.e., perverse—outside a range a reasonable process could reach).

Submission: Complete the **Stage 3 – Complaint Review Form** (Appendix C3) and email to **complaints@weareshockout.com** within **10 working days** of the Stage 2 outcome.

Validity check: Senior management reviews timeliness and grounds and will confirm validity within **10 working days**. If invalid, internal procedures are concluded.

Review: Where valid, a member of SMT is appointed as **Review Officer** to consider whether Stage 2 was conducted fully and in line with this Procedure and whether the decision was reasonable. Exceptionally, the Review Officer may convene a **Review Meeting**.

Possible outcomes:

- Return to Stage 2 for further consideration;
- Modify/overturn Stage 2 outcome;
- Uphold Stage 2 outcome.
  Decision letter: The Stage 3 Outcome Letter will include a **Completion of Procedures** (COP) statement. Receipt of a COP concludes Shockout's internal process and explains how to apply to the **Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)** if dissatisfied.

7.4 Mediation

A mediation style intervention may be offered **at any stage** where appropriate and agreed by all parties.

7.5 Timeline Summary

Step	Student action	Deadline	Shockout action	Typical timescale
Stage 1	Raise concern	Within **20 working days** of event	Acknowledge/assess; provide outcome	**Within 10 working days** of receipt
Stage 2	Submit Formal Complaint	Within **10 working days** of Stage 1 outcome (or within **20 working days** of event if bypassing Stage 1)	Appoint Investigating Officer; investigate; issue outcome	**Within 30 working days** of appointment
Stage 3	Submit Review	Within **10 working days** of Stage 2 outcome	Validity decision; review; issue outcome/COP	Validity decision within **10 working days**; outcome normally within **10 working days**

				thereafter (or after any Review Meeting)

Working days exclude weekends, public holidays, and official Shockout closure days.

8. Remedies

Subject to appropriate approval (Head of School/Division/Professional Service or SMT), remedies may include:

1. Reconsideration of a decision within policy;
2. Referral to an authorised body for an exception;
3. Policy/procedure review (with or without temporary suspension);
4. Suspension/cancellation of a fine, penalty or limitation;
5. Proportionate reimbursement/waiver of fees or charges.
   All decisions will be explained to the student.

9. Additional Provisions (apply to all stages)

9.1- Attendance & engagement. Students are encouraged to attend meetings (in person or via Zoom/MS Teams—cameras on). If a student does not attend without good reason, the meeting may proceed in their absence. Lack of engagement may result in withdrawal of the complaint. Costs of attendance are the student's responsibility.

9.2- Representation. A student may be accompanied by a representative. Legal representation is not normally permitted. The student is responsible for ensuring their representative receives all communications. The representative must not be suspended/excluded from the College / University and must be willing to act. Names must be notified in advance.

9.3- Recording. Audio recording is prohibited unless a reasonable adjustment is agreed under the **Equality Act 2010**.

9.4- Legal proceedings. Where relevant court/tribunal action is in progress, consideration of the complaint will normally be suspended until those

proceedings conclude. If the matters are disposed of in those proceedings, Shockout will normally terminate consideration of the complaint.

9.5-Substitutions. Where a specified postholder is unable to act, a suitably senior nominee may be appointed to avoid conflicts or delays.

9.6- Variations. Shockout may vary this Procedure where necessary to comply with law or best practice. Actions assigned to specific roles may be delegated to appropriately senior nominees.

9.7- Conduct. Offering inducements to staff is prohibited and may lead to disciplinary action and potential criminal liability. Fraudulent, malicious or vexatious submissions may be disregarded and may be referred under the **Student Disciplinary Procedure** or **Fitness to Practise**.

9.8- Data protection. Outcomes that concern another individual (e.g., disciplinary action) may not be shared with the complainant.

10. Monitoring & Reporting

Senior management maintains a log of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints. An annual report to SMT/Principal (as applicable) summarises issues raised, actions taken, timescales, and anonymised profiles to identify trends and improvements.

11. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Shockout and the University of Bolton are committed to equality, diversity and a supportive environment for all. This Procedure has been screened for plain English and against the **public sector equality duty** in relation to protected characteristics.

12. Review & Dissemination

Senior management monitors operation of this Procedure and reviews it periodically for alignment with OIA guidance. The Procedure and forms are

available via the Shockout website/Student Information – Policy Zone and on request from **complaints@weareshockout.com**.

Appendix A — University of Bolton & Partner Organisations (Collaborative Provision)

A1. Complaints about services provided by collaborative partners (e.g., franchise/validated delivery) must be pursued through the **partner's complaints procedure**. Induction materials will explain the partner's process (Stages 1–3 operated by the partner for **service** matters).

A2. For **UK partners** that are OIA members, once a complaint reaches the partner's Stage 3, the partner will issue a **Completion of Procedures** letter enabling a referral to the **OIA** if required.

A3. Outcomes of partner handled complaints are reported to the University annually for monitoring.

A4. Complaints relating to **Academic Quality and Standards** are considered by the **partner** at Stages 1–2; if unresolved, **Stage 3 is conducted by the University of Bolton**. Where a Stage 3 request relates to **service provision** (not academic quality/standards), the partner will consider Stage 3 under its own procedures.

A5. Where the University conducts a Stage 3 review, the **Academic Quality Manager** (or nominee) first confirms the partner investigation was satisfactory, then appoints a Review Officer.

A6. Following Stage 3, the Review Officer may refer the case to the **OffCampus Division** to manage actions with the partner. The University will issue the **COP** with the Review Decision Letter, after which the student may apply to the **OIA** if dissatisfied.

A7. The University accepts Stage 3 reviews only where the complaint concerns **Academic Quality and Standards** (e.g., programme delivery, teaching, feedback, learning resources) and where Stages 1–2 have been completed under the partner's procedure.

A8. **Multiaward (joint/dual/double) degrees:** exceptions may apply as set out in programme documentation.

Appendix B — Consent Forms

B1. ThirdParty Consent Form

Purpose: To authorise a third party to act on a student's behalf for: Academic Appeals; Student Complaints; Academic Misconduct; Disciplinary; Fitness to Practise.

Section A — Student details
Name:
School:
Programme:
Student No.:
Tel.:
Email:

Section B — Authorised person
Name:
Role/Relationship to Student:
Address:
Tel.:
Email:

Section C — Special instructions/conditions
…

Section D — Student declaration

- I confirm I am the person in Section A.
- I confirm the person in Section B agrees to act.
- I will pass all relevant information to the authorised person.
- The authorised person is not suspended/excluded and is not in debt to the University.
- I understand I can withdraw this consent by emailing **complaints@weareshockout.com**.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

B2. Group Complaint Consent Form (to be completed by the Lead Student)

Lead Student
Name:

Student No.:
Programme & Level:
School/Partner Organisation:
Year of Study:
Correspondence Address:
Postcode:
Telephone:
Email:

By signing, all students listed below consent to the complaint being dealt with collectively and authorise the Lead Student to liaise with Shockout on their behalf. If a student cannot sign, they must email **complaints@weareshockout.com** from their student account confirming consent. Shockout must receive consent **within 5 days** of the form being issued and **before Stage 2** commences.

Group members (add rows as needed):

Student No. Full name Programme Year Signature/Email confirmation

Lead Student declaration
I confirm the information provided is true and that I have been nominated as spokesperson for this complaint.
Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C — Templates & Forms

C1. Investigating Officer's Report (Stage 2)

Student name & number:
School/Programme:
Investigating Officer:
Date:

1. **Background** — summary of complaint and Stage 1 steps taken.
2. **Investigation** — people interviewed, meeting dates, documents/evidence gathered.
3. **Meetings** — (add entries): Name; Date; key points.
4. **Documentary evidence** — numbered list.
5. **Conclusions** — indicate upheld/partially upheld/not upheld per issue with rationale.
6. **Recommendations** — proposed outcomes/actions for Head to consider.
   Appendices — notes of meetings and key documents.

C2. Student Complaint Form — Stage 2 (Formal)

Student details
Name | Student No. | Programme | Level | School/Partner | Year | Address | Postcode | Tel | Email

Outline of complaint

- What happened? When? Who was involved? How were you affected?
- What steps did you take at Stage 1 (with dates)? Why are you dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response?

Desired outcomes (reasonable and within University regulations):

Element of complaint Outcome sought

Evidence list (label items e.g., **A**, **B**, **C** and attach):

Declaration
I declare the information is true and I am willing to answer further questions.
Signed: _____ Date: _____

Submission: Email the completed form and evidence to **complaints@weareshockout.com**.

C3. Student Complaint Form — Stage 3 (Review)

Use only after receiving the Stage 2 outcome. Submit within **10 working days** to **complaints@weareshockout.com**.

Student details
Name | Student No. | Programme | Level | School/Partner | Year | Address | Postcode | Tel | Email

Grounds for review (tick all that apply):
☐ A. Procedural irregularity at Stage 2 that materially disadvantaged you.
☐ B. New and relevant evidence not reasonably available at Stage 2 (explain why).
☐ C. Stage 2 outcome was unreasonable (perverse) — explain why with evidence.

Explanation per ground

- **Ground A:**
- **Ground B:**
- **Ground C:**

Desired outcome (without prejudice):
…

Declaration
I declare the information is true and I am willing to answer further questions.
Signed: _____ Date: _____

For Office Use (SMT)

- Date received/acknowledged; validity decision & reason; Review Officer appointed; decision (Upheld/Partially/Not Upheld); date of outcome letter (must include **Completion of Procedures** and OIA guidance).

Appendix D — Stage 1: Raising a Concern (Staff Note Template)

Student details — Name; Status (current/past/other); Student No.; Address; Tel; Email.
Handled by — Name; Position; School/Service/Unit.
Concern details — What happened; when; who; impact; what the student seeks.
Evidence provided — list/labels.
Mediation — would the student consider mediation? Yes/No.
Outcome — summary and date provided to student (copy to Head for monitoring).
Student agreement — statement and signature/date.