



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

**Records Management Section**

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19 October 2021

File ref: FOI2021/00425

Yohannes Lowe

Sent by email: request-779696-  
9ae551c4@whatdotheyknow.com

Dear Yohannes Lowe

**Freedom of Information request: FOI2021/00425**

Thank you for your email of 5 August 2021 requesting information about University accommodation complaints. Please accept our apologies for the delay to our response to your request. The University's working practices have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The University of Edinburgh is a global university, rooted in Scotland. We are globally recognised for our research, development and innovation and we have provided world-class teaching to our students for more than 430 years. We are the largest university in Scotland and in 2019/20 our annual revenue was £1.12 billion, of which £296 million was research income. We have over 44,000 students and over 15,000 staff. We are a founding member of the UK's Russell Group of leading research universities and a member of the League of European Research Universities.

**Student accommodation**

Accommodation, Catering and Events (ACE) delivers student accommodation, catering and support to the University's students. It provides residential accommodation for around 9,500 students at over 40 different locations, and aims to provide students the best possible standards, range of options and value for money. Details of the [accommodation available](#) to new and current undergraduate and postgraduate students are published on our website.

**Complaints**

The University [Complaint Handling Procedure](#) (CHP), introduced in March 2013, is designed to ensure that complaints are properly investigated and are given careful and fair consideration. Complaint handling in the Scottish Higher Education sector falls under the jurisdiction of the SPSO. The University acts in full compliance with the SPSO model Complaint Handling Procedure. The CHP comprises two stages and sets time limits for each stage.

Stage 1 ('frontline resolution') seeks to resolve complaints at local level within five working days unless a short extension is given. Centrally, the University holds basic quarterly information on the volume of Stage 1 complaints, which are managed by 20 individual schools and 70 support services. Collating information about Stage 1 complaints costs more than £600, the limit over which the University is not required to respond to freedom of information requests.

Stage 2 ('investigation') is used for complex complaints or those which have not been resolved at Stage 1, and should be completed within 20 working days unless an extension is given. As explained in the CHP, the nature of the complaint may also require parallel procedures to be initiated, such as the staff and student disciplinary procedures as explained above.

## **Your request**

You asked how many complaints/reports from undergraduate students regarding issues with their University accommodation did the residential services or student living team receive in academic year 2020/21. You asked for each complaint to be broken down by date the issue was reported/complained about, the type of issue that was reported/complained about and the date the issue was resolved.

The types of issues that you provide as examples in your request could be raised by students within complaints dealt with under Stages 1 or 2 of the CHP, or within repair reports. Providing all the information you have requested would take approximately two weeks of work and therefore cost more than £600, the limit over which the University is not required to respond to freedom of information requests.

While the University can provide some information relating to issues dealt with as complaints, the complexities with the scale and ownership of the University's residential estate means that providing information contained within repair reports is much more time consuming. The University manages 10,000 beds, not all of which are directly operated by the University. Therefore, there are tens of thousands of records relating to repairs, which would need to be manually reviewed to identify and collate the requested information. Please note that the University would only be able to provide the requested information for the accommodation it directly operates.

Some of the requested information relating to complaints about the accommodation the University directly operates is provided in Table 1 below. Please note that we have included complaints made on behalf of undergraduate students.

**Table 1: Information about complaints relating to University-operated accommodation made by undergraduate students, 2020/21**

<b>Nature of complaint</b>	<b>Number of calendar days to resolve complaint</b>
Lack of understanding and empathy displayed by staff. Students reluctant to ask for help.	1
No access to a study room/common room in accommodation (part of a wider University complaint)	5
Fewer services provided	4

Nature of complaint	Number of calendar days to resolve complaint
Issue with mattress	1 (same day)
Fewer services provided	1 (same day)
Not able to get a repair due to restrictions	2
Staff not doing enough to keep Covid-19 under control. Fewer services/facilities provided.	19
Handling of repair request by staff	4
Fewer services provided	3

You will see that I have not provided the dates complaints were received and resolved. This is because disclosing this information may enable the individuals who made the complaints to be identified. This would breach the data protection principles under data protection law. The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 does not require us to provide this sort of information as it is exempt under section 38(1)(b).

Please note it does not matter who makes the request under FOISA, if we disclose information to one person we are expected to disclose it to all. While you may not be able to identify individuals from the information you have requested, others, for example students and staff, may be able to do so.

However, I have included in Table 1 the number of calendar days it took to resolve each issue. Please note that some of the complaints resulted in learning points being identified.

You then asked how much money the University paid in compensation which related to the accommodation complaints made during 2020/21 and how many of these complaints were upheld.

During 2020/21, no compensation related to accommodation complaints was paid out. Adjustments and reduced rents were provided instead, where appropriate. Two complaints were partially upheld. These were resolved at Stage 1 local level.

Finally, you asked for all correspondence, with all personal or potentially identifiable information redacted, sent to the residential services/accommodation manager complaining about accommodation in 2020/21. You asked for the correspondence to be limited to that of complaints that resulted in compensation being paid out/awarded to the student.

As there were no complaints about accommodation that resulted in compensation being paid out to a student, we do not hold the information you have requested.

## Right to review

If you are dissatisfied with this response, you may ask the University to conduct a review of this decision by contacting the University's Records Management Section in writing (e.g. by letter or email) or in some other recorded form (e.g. audio or video tape). You should describe the original request, explain your grounds for dissatisfaction, and include an address for correspondence. You have 40 working days from receipt of this letter to submit a review request. The contact details for the Records Management Section are at the top of this letter. When the review process has been completed, if you are still

dissatisfied, you may use the [Scottish Information Commissioner's guidance on making an appeal](#) to make an appeal to the Commissioner. If you do not have access to the Internet, please let me know and I will provide a copy of the relevant web pages.

**Privacy notice for information request applicants**

[The University of Edinburgh's request privacy notice](#), which describes how we use the information you have supplied about yourself and your request, is published on the University website.

Yours sincerely

**Celia Jenkins**  
Records Management Section

**If you require this letter in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background, please contact the Records Management Section on 0131 651 4099 or email [recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk](mailto:recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk)**