



UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

Foreword

The University of St Andrews recognises that there may be occasions when a student or member of public feels that the level of service or treatment that they have received from the University has fallen short of what might reasonably be expected. This Complaints Handling Procedure reflects the University's commitment to dealing with such complaints as timely, effectively and fairly as possible. Our aim is to resolve issues of dissatisfaction as close as possible to the level at which they arise and to conduct thorough and fair investigations of complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions based on the facts of each individual case.

Resolving complaints early saves time and contributes to the overall efficiency of the University. Concentrating on achieving an early resolution of a complaint as close to the point of contact as possible frees up the time of our academic and support staff and ultimately contribute to the continued positive experience of those studying or in receipt of other services from the University.

The University of St Andrews is committed to promoting equality and diversity in all its activities. This Procedure should therefore be read in conjunction with the University's statements and policies in relation to [Equality & Diversity](#), [Harassment & Bullying at work and study](#), [student confidentiality](#) and [Whistleblowing](#). Students should note that the University has separate procedures for dealing with [Academic Appeals](#), which fall outwith the scope of this Procedure.

This procedure is compliant with *The Scottish Higher Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure*, published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) on 19 December 2012.

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1. What is a complaint?

For the purpose of this procedure, a complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more individuals about the standard of service, action or lack of action by or on behalf of the University'.

A complaint may therefore relate to:

- the quality and standard of service;
- failure to provide a service;
- the quality of facilities or learning resources;
- treatment by or attitude of a staff member, student or contractor;
- inappropriate behaviour by a staff member, student or contractor;
- the failure of the University to follow an appropriate administrative process;
- dissatisfaction with the University's policy, although it is recognised that policy is set at the discretion of the University of St Andrews.

Although the above list is not exhaustive, not every concern raised with the University can be categorised as a complaint. For example, the following **are not complaints** eligible for pursuing under this Procedure:

- a routine, first-time request for a service;
- a request under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act or Data Protection Act;
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice;
- a response to an invitation to provide feedback through a formal mechanism such as a questionnaire or committee membership will generally not be treated as a complaint;
- an insurance claim;
- an issue which is being, or has been, considered by a court or tribunal;
- an attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where the University's procedure has been completed and the University's decision has been issued;
- a grievance by a member of staff which is eligible for handling through the appropriate Human Resources grievance procedure;
- an academic appeal requesting a review of an academic decision on assessment, progression, completion or admission.

Such issues should be raised and considered under the appropriate alternative University procedures cited below:

- [Freedom of Information Publication Scheme](#)
- [Data Protection Policy](#)
- [Grievance Procedures for all Staff](#)
- [Non-Academic Misconduct Policy for Students](#)
- [University insurance policies](#)
- [Policy on Student Academic Appeals](#)
- [Policy on Fitness to Practise Medicine](#)

A complaint which involves a combination of issues and which may be potentially relevant to other University processes (such as student disciplinary or academic appeal procedures) will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The University will normally determine an appropriate sequence in which the constituent matters will be investigated and responded to. The integrity of each individual process will typically be preserved.

1.1 Who can make a complaint?

This Procedure covers complaints from anyone who receives, requests or is affected by the services offered by the University of St Andrews. This includes, although is not limited to:

- matriculated students currently registered for a full or part-time programme of study at the University (herein referred to as 'students' through the remainder of this document);
- members of the public, where they have a complaint about matters which are (or which were at the time the issue arose) the responsibility of the University; and
- applicants applying for a course of study at the University and whose complaint does not relate to issues of academic judgement.

The basic processes for investigating complaints are the same for students, members of the public and applicants to the University.

The University of St Andrews recognises that some individuals may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own. In these instances the University will accept complaints brought by a representative of the person who is dissatisfied with the University, as long as the individual affected has unequivocally given their personal consent under the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Therefore, the individual affected must provide explicit written consent for a representative to act on their behalf. As with anonymous complaints, sufficient information must also be provided by the representative to enable the University to investigate the concerns raised. Complaints made by a representative under the written authority of the individual originally affected will be dealt with according to the same timescales outlined within this Procedure.

1.2 Anonymous Complaints

Complaints submitted anonymously will only be considered if there is enough information provided in the complaint submission to enable the University to make further meaningful enquiries. If, however, an anonymous complaint does not provide sufficient information to enable further action, the University may decide not to pursue the complaint further. However, the University may give consideration to the issues raised, and if appropriate the complaint will be recorded in order for corrective action to be taken where appropriate.

A decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint will be authorised by a senior University officer. If an anonymous complaint contains allegations that are serious in nature, it will be referred to a senior University officer immediately.

1.3 Complaints involving more than one School, Department or Unit

If a complaint relates to the actions of two or more Schools, Departments or Units, the staff member receiving the complaint will confer with the other area(s) to decide who will take the lead on the complaint. The complainant will be told to whom the complaint is being passed and given their contact details. Coordination may still be required between different areas of the University to ensure that the complaint is fully addressed in a single response.

1.4 Complaints involving other organisations or contractors who provide a service on behalf of the University

If an individual complains to the University about the service of another organisation, but the University has no involvement in the issue, the individual will be advised to contact the appropriate organisation directly.

Where a complaint relates to both a University service and the service of another organisation the complaint will be handled through this Procedure. In particular, the same timescales will apply. This relates to complaints that involve services provided on the University's behalf (such as partner universities and contractors). If enquiries to a partner or contracted organisation in relation to the complaint are required, care will be taken to comply with Data Protection legislation and the University's guidance on handling personal information. Such complaints may include, for example:

- A complaint made in relation to provision of third-party services
- A complaint made about a service that is contracted out
- A complaint made to the University about a student loan where the dissatisfaction relates to both the service we have provided and the service the funding body has provided.

1.5 Time limit for making complaints

Complaints should be raised with the University as soon as problems arise to enable prompt investigation and swift resolution, which is in the interests of all parties. This Procedure sets a time limit of six months to raise a complaint with the University, starting from when the complainant first became aware of the problem, unless there are special circumstances for requesting consideration of a complaint beyond this time.

Beyond the six-month time limit, the University will exercise discretion in the way that the time limit is applied. This will take account of the time limit within which a member of the public can normally ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to consider complaints, which is twelve months from when the person first became aware of the issue about which they are complaining.

A request for the University to discretionarily investigate complaints beyond the time limits given above will not normally be granted unless there is evidence that the complainant was precluded from raising a complaint within the normal timescales as a result of serious illness or other circumstances which are exceptional or relevant to the complaint itself. Such requests to the University must be supported by relevant evidence.

International students in the UK on a Tier 4 Student Visa must make themselves aware of the potential financial and immigration implications that may occur should the consideration of their or complaint extend beyond their existing permission to stay. Most international students not undertaking a full-time programme of study or taking a leave of absence are required by law to leave the UK. The University's procedures are in line with the Immigration Rules for Points Based Migrants, which may be subject to change without notice. International students intending to submit a complaint as outlined in this Procedure should contact the University's [International Student Advisers](#) as early as possible in the process to discuss the specifics of their case.

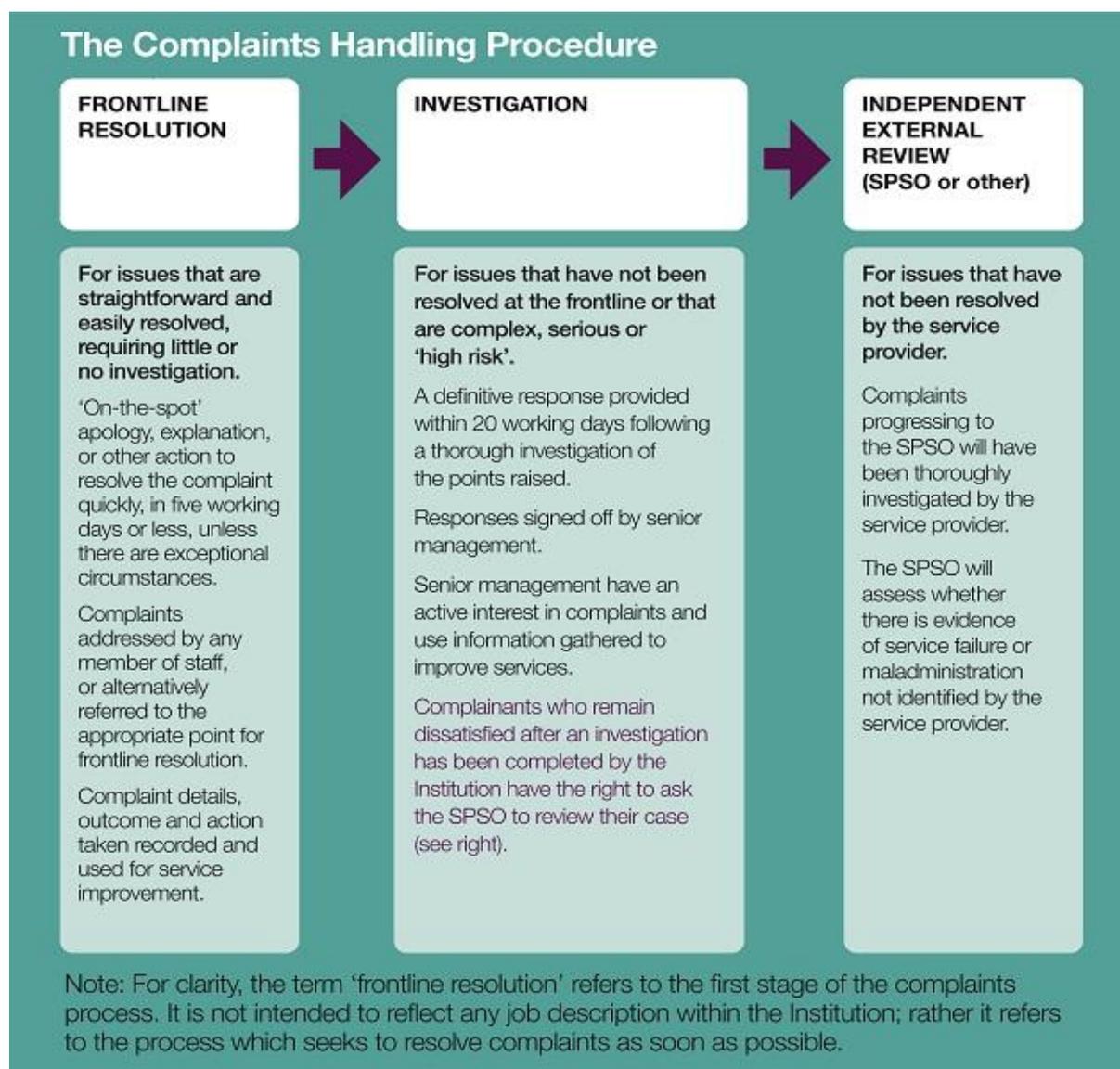
2. The Complaints Handling Process

This Procedure is intended to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process with a strong focus on early resolution by empowered and well-trained staff.

The procedure involves up to two stages:

1. Frontline resolution seeks to resolve straightforward complaints swiftly and effectively at the point at which the complaint is made, or as close to that point as possible.

2. Investigation is appropriate where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of frontline resolution, or where frontline resolution is not possible or appropriate due to the complexity or seriousness of the case.



2.1 Stage One: frontline resolution – to be completed within 5 working days

Anyone who has a complaint is encouraged to raise it initially at the point of, or as close to the point of, becoming aware of it as possible and to raise it with the School, Department or Unit in which the issue arose. Complaints at this stage may be made face-to-face, by phone, in writing or by email. The purpose of frontline resolution is to attempt to resolve as quickly as possible complaints which are straightforward and require little or no investigation. Complaints at this stage of the process may be addressed by any relevant member of the University's staff and may be handled by way of a face-to-face discussion with the complainant, or by asking an appropriate member of staff (who may be the Head of School or Director of Unit concerned) to deal with the complaint.

Members of staff to whom complaints are made will consider the following key questions:

- Is this a complaint or should the individual be referred to another procedure?
- What specifically is the complaint (or complaints) about and which area(s) of the University is / are involved?
- What outcome is the complainant hoping for and can it be achieved?
- Is this complaint straightforward and likely to be resolved with little or no investigation?
- Can the complaint be resolved on the spot by providing an apology / explanation / alternative solution?
- Can another member of staff assist in seeking a frontline resolution?

- What assistance can be provided to the complainant in taking this forward?

Resolution may be achieved by providing an on-the-spot explanation of why the issue occurred and/or an apology and, where possible, what will be done to stop this happening in the future.

If responsibility for the issue being complained about lies in the staff member's area of work, every attempt will be made to resolve the problem at source. If responsibility lies elsewhere, the staff member receiving the complaint will liaise with the relevant area in an attempt to resolve the issue promptly.

2.1.1 Extension to the five day timeline

Frontline resolution will normally be completed within 5 working days, though a resolution may be achieved more quickly. In exceptional circumstances a short extension of time may be necessary to increase the possibility of resolving the complaint at the frontline resolution stage (for example, by obtaining information from other areas of the University where no single School, Department or Unit is responsible for the issue(s) being complained about). Where an extension is required, this will be approved by an appropriate senior manager. The complainant will be told of the reasons for extending the deadline and advised of the new timescale for resolution. The maximum extension which can be granted is 5 working days (i.e. not more than 10 working days in total from the date of receipt of the complaint).

For the purpose of this Procedure, Monday to Friday are counted as working days except when the University is closed for a Public Holiday. Saturdays and Sundays are not counted as working days.

2.1.2 Closing the complaint at the frontline resolution stage

The outcome will be communicated to the complainant. This may be face-to-face, by phone, in writing or by email. The response to the complainant will address all the topics for which the University is responsible, explaining therein the reasons for the University's decision. There is no requirement for the University to send out further written communication to the complainant following the issuing of such a response. Once a decision has been issued, the record of the complaint will be updated on the recording system, detailing therein the decision reached. The complaint will then be closed.

2.2 Stage two: investigation – to be completed within 20 working days

These complaints may already have been considered at the frontline resolution stage, or they may be complaints identified upon receipt as appropriate for immediate investigation. The purpose of conducting an investigation is to establish all of the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to provide a full, objective and proportionate response to the complainant that represents the University's definitive position

A complaint will be moved to the investigation stage when:

- frontline resolution was attempted, but the complainant remains dissatisfied. This may be after the case has been closed following the frontline resolution stage;
- the complainant refuses to recognise or engage with the frontline resolution process and is insistent that the issue be addressed by a more senior officer;
- the issues raised are complex and will require detailed investigation;
- the complaint relates to issues that have been identified by the University as high risk or high profile.

Special attention will be given to identifying complaints considered high risk /high profile, as these may require particular action or may raise critical issues requiring direct input from senior management. Potential high risk /high profile complaints may:

- involve a death or terminal illness;
- involve serious service failure, for example major delays in service provision or repeated failures to provide a service;
- generate significant and on-going press interest;
- pose a serious operational risk to the University;
- present issues of a highly sensitive nature.

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after the frontline resolution stage and wishes to escalate their original complaint within the University, they should contact the Office of the Vice-Principal (Governance) (by email: complaints@st-andrews.ac.uk; telephone: 01334 462555; address: College Gate, North Street, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9AJ).

A person (or their authorised representative) can make a complaint in writing (preferred), in person or by telephone. Where it is clear that a complaint will be immediately considered at the investigation stage, or is subsequently referred to the investigation stage, the complainant will be expected to complete the appropriate [complaint form](#) to provide full details of the complaint including any relevant documentation. If required, a staff member will be available to assist a complainant in completing the complaint form.

2.2.1 What the University will do when it receives a complaint for investigation

The University will allocate the complaint to an appropriate complaints investigator (see section 3 of this procedure). It is important that both the complainant and the University are clear from the start of the investigation stage exactly what is being investigated, and to ensure that both the complainant and the complaints investigator understand the scope of the investigation. In discussion with the complainant, therefore, three key questions will be considered:

1. What specifically is the complaint (or complaints)?
2. What does the complainant want to achieve by complaining?
3. Do the complainant's expectations appear to be reasonable and achievable?

If the complainant's expectations appear to exceed what the University can reasonably provide or are not within the University's power to provide, the complainant will be advised of this as soon as possible in order to manage expectations about possible outcomes.

Details of the complaint will be recorded on the University's system for recording complaints. Where the complaint has been through the frontline resolution stage, this will be shown in the complaints log. At the conclusion of the investigation stage, the log will be updated to reflect the final outcome and any action taken in response to the complaint.

Complainants are strongly encouraged to have all supporting documentary evidence available prior to escalating their complaint from the frontline stage. Once the complaint has progressed to the investigation stage the following timelines and extension criteria will apply.

2.2.2 Timelines

The following deadlines will be used for cases at the investigation stage:

- complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days;

- the University will provide a full response to the complaint as soon as possible but not later than 20 working days from the time that the complaint was received for investigation.

2.2.3 Extension to the timeline

Not all investigations will be able to meet this deadline; for example some complaints are so complex that they will require careful consideration and detailed investigation beyond the 20 working days timeline. Where there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale, senior management will exercise judgement and will set time limits on any extended investigation, with the agreement of the complainant. If the complainant does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, then senior management will consider and confirm the extension. In such circumstances, the complainant will be kept updated on the reason for the delay and given a revised timescale for bringing the investigation to a conclusion. It is expected, however, that this will be the exception and that the University will always strive to deliver a definitive response to the complaint within 20 working days.

Where an extension has been agreed, this will be recorded appropriately, including the reason given for the delay, and the proportion of complaints that exceed the 20 working day-limit will be evident from reported statistics.

A request from a complainant to the University to extend or delay the investigation timeline of 20 working days (for instance, in order for a complainant to submit additional evidence to their initial submission) will be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, should there be sufficient evidence provided to enable a decision to be reached without requiring additional information from the complainant, the University reserves the right to conclude its investigation and issue a final response according to the published timescales given in this Procedure.

For the purpose of this Procedure, Monday to Friday are counted as working days except when the University is closed for a Public Holiday. Saturdays and Sundays are not counted as working days.

2.2.4 Mediation & other dispute resolution options

Some complex complaints (where, for example, the complainant and/or other involved parties have become entrenched in their position) may benefit from a different approach to resolving the complaint. Using mediation can help both parties to understand what is driving the complaint, and may be more likely to result in a mutually satisfactory conclusion being reached. Whilst the University does not have a formal mediation service, parties wishing to consider alternatives to a formal complaint investigation should discuss this with their assigned complaints investigator. Where other means of dispute resolution are agreed and attempted, the formal complaints investigation will be suspended pending its outcome. If the complaint is not resolved by the means of such alternative resolution, the formal complaints procedure will be resumed and revised timescales for a final response agreed.

2.2.5 Closing the complaint at the investigation stage

The outcome of the investigation will be communicated to the complainant in writing. The decision, and details of how and when it was communicated to the complainant, will be recorded on the University's system for recording complaints. The decision will also advise the complainant about:

- their right to ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to review the complaint;
- the time limit for doing so;
- how to contact the SPSO.

2.3 Independent external review (SPSO)

Once the investigation stage has been completed, the complainant is entitled to ask the SPSO to look at their complaint. The SPSO considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of the University's internal complaints handling procedure. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failure and maladministration (administrative fault) as well as the way the University has handled the complaint.

The SPSO requires the University to use the wording below to inform complainants of their right to ask the SPSO to review the complaint.

2.3.1 Information about the SPSO

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland. This includes complaints about Scottish universities. If you remain dissatisfied with the University of St Andrews after completing its complaints process, you can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint. The SPSO cannot normally look at complaints:

- where you have not gone all the way through the University's complaints handling procedure;
- more than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about; or
- that have been or are being considered in court.

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7NS

SPSO
Freepost EH641
Edinburgh
EH3 0BR

Freephone: 0800 377 7330

Online contact: www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us

Website: www.spsso.org.uk

Mobile site: <http://m.spsso.org.uk>

3. Governance of the Complaints Handling Procedure

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

All staff will be aware of:

- the University's Complaints Handling Procedure;
- how to handle and record complaints at the frontline resolution stage;
- who they can refer a complaint to if they are unable to handle the matter personally;
- the need to try and resolve complaints early and as locally (within their respective School, Department or Unit) as possible; and
- their clear authority to attempt to resolve any complaints they may be called upon to deal with.

Senior management will ensure that:

- the University's final position on a complaint investigation is signed off by an appropriate senior University officer (normally a member of the Principal's Office or delegated deputy) in order to provide assurance that this is the definitive response of the University and that the complainant's concerns have been taken seriously;
- it maintains overall responsibility and accountability for the management and governance of complaints handling within the University;
- it has an active role in, and understanding of, the University's Complaints Handling Procedure (although not necessarily involved in the decision making process of complaints handling);
- mechanisms are in place to ensure a consistent approach to the way complaints handling information is managed, monitored, reviewed and reported at all levels in the University; and
- complaints information is used to improve services, and this is evident from regular publications.

Principal: The Principal provides leadership and direction to the University. This includes ensuring that there is an effective complaints handling procedure with a robust investigation process which demonstrates that organisational learning is in place. The Principal may delegate responsibility for the procedure, but will receive assurance of complaints performance by way of regular reporting through appropriate internal channels. The Principal will also ensure that complaints are used to identify service improvements for implementation in the wider organisation as appropriate.

Vice-Principal (Governance): Has delegated responsibility from the Principal to oversee the effective operation of the University's Complaints Handling procedures and processes.

Vice-Principals, Deans of Faculty, Heads of Schools and Directors of Units: As senior University officers, may be involved in investigations or responsible for preparing and signing response letters to complainants after the investigation is complete, confirming thereby that the response addresses all aspects of the complaint.

Complaints Investigator: Each Complaints Investigator is a suitably trained staff member responsible for the conduct of the complaints investigation and is involved in the investigation and the co-ordination of all aspects of the response to the complainant. This may include preparing a comprehensive written report, including details of any recommended procedural changes to service delivery. Each Complaints Investigator has a clear remit to investigate effectively and reach robust decisions on more complex complaints, with appropriate support from senior management on the extent and limits of discretion and responsibilities in investigating and resolving complaints,

including the ability to identify failings, take effective remedial action and apologise, where it is appropriate to do so.

All staff: Under this Procedure a complaint may be made to any member of staff. All staff should, therefore, be aware of the University's Complaints Handling Procedure and how to handle and record complaints at the frontline resolution stage. They should also be aware of whom to refer a complaint to, in case they are not able to personally handle the matter. The University encourages all staff to try to resolve complaints early, as close to the point of service delivery as possible, and quickly to prevent escalation.

SPSO liaison officer: This role is normally fulfilled by the Executive Officer to the University Court & Senate (or delegated deputy). The SPSO liaison officer provides complaints information in an orderly, structured way within requested timescales, provides comments on factual accuracy on behalf of the University in response to SPSO reports, and confirms and verifies that recommendations in response to complaints have been implemented.

3.2 Complaints about senior University staff

Complaints about senior staff can be difficult to handle as there may be a conflict of interest for the staff investigating the complaint. When serious complaints are raised against senior staff it is particularly important that the investigation is conducted by an individual who is independent of the situation. The University will ensure that there are strong governance arrangements in place that set out clear procedures for handling such complaints.

For complaints against senior staff, the following procedures will normally apply:

- If the complaint is against a Head of School, the matter will be overseen by the appropriate Dean of Faculty (or the Deans' Office in the case of Divinity or Medicine).
- If the complaint is against a Dean of Faculty, the matter will be overseen by the Vice-Principal (Proctor).
- If the complaint is against the Director of a University service unit, the matter will be overseen by the member of the Principal's Office who has line management responsibility for that service.
- If the complaint is against a member of the Principal's Office (acting in either an academic or non-academic capacity), the matter will be overseen by the Principal.
- If the complaint is against the Principal (acting in either an academic or non-academic capacity), the matter will be overseen by the Senior Governor of the University Court.

Any member of the public or former or current University employee or student who has information about possible serious malpractices within the University may bring that concern immediately to attention via the University's [Whistleblowing Policy](#).

4. Recording, reporting, publicising and learning

Valuable feedback is obtained through complaints. One of the objectives of this Procedure is to identify opportunities to improve provision of services across the University. Staff will record all complaints so that we can use the complaints data for analysis and management reporting. By recording and using complaints information in this way, the causes of complaints can be identified, addressed and, where appropriate, training opportunities can be identified and improvements introduced.

4.1 Recording complaints

To collect suitable data, it is essential that all complaints are recorded in sufficient detail. The minimum recording requirements are as follows:

- name and contact details of the complainant and student matriculation number (if applicable)
- date of receipt of the complaint
- how the complaint was received
- category of complaint
- staff member/s responsible for handling the complaint
- School, Department or Unit to which the complaint relates
- action taken and outcome at frontline resolution stage
- date the complaint was closed at the frontline resolution stage
- date the investigation stage was initiated (if applicable)
- action taken and outcome at investigation stage (if applicable)
- date the complaint was closed at the investigation stage (if applicable)
- underlying cause and remedial action taken (if applicable)
- response times at each stage

The University has structured systems for recording complaints, their outcomes and any resulting action so that the complaint data can be used for internal reporting as indicated below.

4.2 Reporting of complaints

The University has a system for the internal reporting of complaints information. Regularly reporting the analysis of complaints information helps to inform management of where improvements are required. Information reported internally will include:

- performance statistics, detailing complaints volumes, types and key performance information, for example on time taken and stage at which complaints were resolved;
- the trends and outcomes of complaints and the actions taken in response including examples to demonstrate how complaints have helped improve services.

This information will be reported at least quarterly to senior management and at least annually to the governing body the University Court, via the Audit & Risk Committee.

4.3 Publicising complaints performance information

The University will publish on a quarterly basis a summary of complaints outcomes, trends and actions taken to improve services, with a focus on case studies and examples of how complaints have helped improve services. This may also include positive feedback from students and members of the public.

Publicising complaints outcomes in this manner demonstrates the University's approach to improving services on the basis of complaints. It also helps ensure transparency in our complaints handling service and helps demonstrate to our students and members of the public that we value their complaints.

The University will report, via the institutional website, on complaints handling performance annually in line with SPSO requirements. This includes performance statistics showing the volume and type of complaints and key performance details, for example on the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved.

4.4 Learning from complaints

Each Complaints Investigator will always ensure that all parties involved understand the findings of the investigation and any decisions made. Senior management will ensure that the University has procedures in place to act on issues that are identified. These procedures facilitate:

- using complaints data to identify the root cause of complaints;
- taking action to reduce the chance of similar cases happening again;
- recording the details of corrective action in the complaints file;
- systematically reviewing complaints performance reports to improve performance.

The analysis of management reports detailing complaints performance will help to ensure that any trends or wider issues which may not be obvious from individual complaints are quickly identified and addressed. Where the University identifies the need for service improvement:

- an officer (or team) will be designated the 'owner' of the issue, with responsibility for ensuring that any identified action is taken;
- a target date will be set for the action to be implemented, and followed up on to ensure delivery within this timescale. The Audit & Risk Committee will monitor the implementation of actions;
- where appropriate, performance in the service area will be monitored to ensure that the issue has been resolved.

4.5 Maintaining confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important factor in conducting complaints investigations. The University will always have regard to any legislative requirements, for example, data protection legislation and also internal policies on confidentiality and the use of complainant information. Complaints will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality and information released only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint. No third party will be told any more about the investigation than is strictly necessary in order to obtain the information required from them.

In making a complaint, complainants should accept that limited disclosure of all or part of their submission will be required to enable investigation of their complaint to proceed. Complainants have the right to expect that everyone who responds to or investigates a complaint will do so impartially. No individual will be permitted to act in any manner in a case in which they have a material interest or in which any actual or potential conflict of interest may arise.

Where a complaint has been raised against a student or member of staff and has been upheld, the complainant will be advised of this. However, it would not be appropriate to share specific details affecting specific students or staff members, particularly where disciplinary action is taken.

4.6 Managing unacceptable behaviour

It is recognised that people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. The circumstances leading to a complaint may result in the complainant acting in an unacceptable way. Complainants who display difficult behaviour may still have a legitimate grievance, and the University will therefore treat all complaints seriously and assess them accordingly.

The actions of complainants who are angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on time and resources or unacceptable behaviour towards University staff. Unacceptable behaviour includes (but is not limited to):

- Aggressive or abusive behaviour, including inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations.
- Unreasonable demands, the result of which is that the complainant takes up an excessive amount of staff time and in so doing disadvantages other complainants.
- Unreasonable use of the complaints process - when the effect of repeated complaints is to harass or to prevent the University pursuing a legitimate aim or implementing a legitimate decision.

The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards University staff is likely to result in the termination of all direct contact with the complainant. The University may report such behaviour to the police (this will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened) and disciplinary proceedings may be initiated should the complainant be a currently matriculated student or member of staff. Where a complainant has exhibited such behaviour, the University reserves the right to refuse to consider the complaint or future complaints from such individuals.

4.7 Supporting the complainant

Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by the services the University provides has the right to access the University's Complaints Handling Procedure. Complainants who do not have English as a first language may need help with interpretation and translation services. Other complainants may have specific needs which the University will seek to address to ensure easy access to the Complaints Handling Procedure by making reasonable adjustments to help the complainant. There are a number of support services available which can provide helpful support to those who wish to pursue a complaint with the University. For instance, students seeking impartial and independent advice on formulating a complaint submission should contact the [Student Education Advocate at the Students' Association](#).

5. The Complaints Handling Procedure (Flowchart)

