

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE
I YEAR REVIEW

I. BACKGROUND

Following changes in sector guidance on handling complaints received by universities, a new complaints procedure (following a template created by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman) was adopted in the academic year 2013-14. The intention is to address complaints in a timely fashion at a level close to the occurrence of the issue.

The University has established a role of Complaints Officer, a dedicated email contact and provided training for staff who handle complaints at the first stage. It has also undertaken to provide an annual report on complaints-related numbers and trends to the Audit & Risk Committee.

2. RESULTS

A total of 41 student and public Stage 2 complaints were submitted to Complaints Office in the year to end of August 2014. In future years an indication of the trend in numbers of complaints will be provided.

Of the 41 cases considered in 2013/14 by the Complaints Office, 5 were upheld in full, 21 were not upheld, 9 were referred back to the line management (Stage 1) , 2 referred to the separate academic appeals process, and 3 complaints were withdrawn and 1 was directed to the SPSO.

The most frequently cited grounds for second stage complaints were School-based issues (cited in 39 submissions). Most cited grounds include matters of supervision (cited in 11 submissions), matters of termination (cited in 11 submissions) and matters of communication (cited in 4 submissions). 3 complaints received from the public regarding the editorial content of the student newspaper or student behaviour.

In first stage complaints, the subject of most student submissions related to Student Services (37) or Residential & Business Services (18), including student accommodation, temperature control, security issues and cleanliness of accommodation. 100 % of complaints were answered at the first stage within the five-day time frame. Stage 2 Complaints follow when the complainant disagrees with the outcome of Stage 1.

One complainant has made a total of 15 stage 2 complaints against the School of Medicine, one of which was upheld.

One case has escalated to an external investigation by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and is still being considered.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The procedures have been implemented for the first time in the 2013-2014 year and as a result, formal policies, monitoring and management of processes and standardised elements of practice (such as template letters) have been developed. It is acknowledged that each case requires considerable resource in investigation and in making specific responses.

Many complaints arise following an initial effort to achieve resolution at a school or unit level, and training is being implemented to student-facing staff across the University. This training takes accounts of a survey of first line complaints handlers.

Academic appeals are dealt with separately, although in the minds of students they are often conflated and the separate process need to be communicated effectively to students.

The reporting procedure has been agreed through the Audit and Risk committee and feedback is welcome.

Professor Nic Beech
Vice Principal Governance Policy and Planning
26th August 2014

Summary Table

Stage	School/Unit	Number	Outcome: resolved	Outcome: escalated	Outcome: other	Action within timeframe
1	Schools	15	11	2 Referred to Stage 2	2 Complaints Withdrawn	100 %
2	Units	85	84	0	1 Complaint Withdrawn	100
	Schools	34	5 Upheld 20 Not held	2 escalated Academic Appeal 1 referred to SPSO	3 referred to frontline 3 Complaints withdrawn	97% 1 required extension
	Units	7	1 Upheld 0 Not upheld	0	6 referred to frontline	100 %

Complaints Office - Status of Complaints (2013 - 2014):

First Line

STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS

	TOTAL	UPHELD	UPHELD IN PART	NOT UPHELD	Apology	Referred to Stage 2	Complainant withdrawn	Explanation	Mediation	Referred
STAGE 1	100	9	4	15	52	2	3	6	1	8

Breakdown of Complaints by Schools										
	TOTAL	UPHELD	UPHELD IN PART	NOT UPHELD	Apology	Referred to Stage 2	Complainant withdrawn	Explanation	Mediation	Referred
Biology	2				2					
Computer Science	5			1	2	1	1			
Economics	1		1							
IR	3	3								
Management	3			1		1	1			
Medicine	1			1						

Breakdown by Units										
	TOTAL	UPHELD	UPHELD IN PART	NOT UPHELD	Apology	Referred to Stage 2	Complainant withdrawn	Explanation	Mediation	Referred
CAPOD	1				1					
Careers	1				1					
Development	16				16					
Estates	3	1			2					
Finance	2	1		1						
Human Resource	1			1						
RBS	18	2	1	2	6			6	1	
Registry	1				1					
Saint Sports	5	1	1	3						
Student Services	37	2	1	4	21		1			8

Complaints Office - Status of Complaints (2013 – 2014):**Second Line**

Course Type	Faculty	CATEGORIES	Reason for Appeal/Complaint	Outcome	Closed within time
UG	Chemistry	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	Upheld	10 Day extension
UG	ELT	Current Student	School based complaint	Complaint Withdrawn	Yes
NA	NA	Public	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	Complainant directed to Stage 1 - Student Services	Yes
UG	Arts	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	Complaint Withdrawn	Yes
UG	Medicine	Current Student	School based Complaint - Against termination of studies	Not Upheld	Yes
PG	Science	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	Academic Appeal	Yes
PG	Science	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	Academic Appeal	Yes
PG	Arts	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	Not upheld	Yes

Course Type	Faculty	CATEGORIES	Reason for Appeal/Complaint	Outcome	Closed within time
UG	Medicine	Current Student	School based Complaint - Against termination of studies	Not upheld	Yes
UG	Science	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of communication	Complaint Withdrawn	Yes
UG	Medicine	Current Student	Unit based complaint - matter of accommodation	Upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Current Student	School based Complaint - Against termination of studies	Not upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Student	School based Complaint - Against termination of studies	not upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Student	School based Complaint - Against termination of studies	not upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Student	School based complaint - matter of progression	not upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Student	School based Complaint - Against termination of studies	not upheld	Yes
NA	NA	Public	Unit based complaint - Matter of student behaviour	Referred to Stage 1 (Unit)	Yes

Course Type	Faculty	CATEGORIES	Reason for Appeal/Complaint	Outcome	Closed within time
PG	Arts	Parent on behalf of student	School based Complaint - Matter of discrimination	Referred to Stage 1 (School)	Yes
UG	Medicine	Student	School based complaint - matter of progression	not upheld	Yes
NA	NA	Public	Unit based complaint - Matter of communication	Referred to Stage 1 (Unit)	Yes
UG	Arts	Student	Unit based complaint - matter of accommodation	Referred to Stage 1 (Unit)	Yes
UG	Medicine	Past Student	School based Complaint - Matter of discrimination	not upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Past Student	School based Complaint - Matter of discrimination	not upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Past Student	School based Complaint - Against termination of studies	not upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Past Student	School based Complaint - Matter of discrimination	not upheld	Yes
UG	Medicine	Past Student	School based Complaint - Matter of discrimination	not upheld	Yes

Course Type	Faculty	CATEGORIES	Reason for Appeal/Complaint	Outcome	Closed within time
UG	Medicine	Past Student	School based Complaint - Matter of discrimination	not upheld	Yes
PG	Arts	Past Student	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	Upheld	Yes
PG	Arts	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	Referred to Stage 1 (School)	Yes
UG	Science	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of assessment	Upheld	Yes
UG	Arts	Current Student	Unit based complaint - matter of accommodation	Referred to Stage 1 (Unit)	Yes
UG	Accommodation	Current Student	Unit based complaint - matter of accommodation	Referred to Stage 1 (Unit)	Yes
Potential Student	Divinity	Applying Student	School based complaint - matter of admission	Not Upheld	Yes
UG	Art History	Current Student	School based complaint - Matter of supervision	Referred to Stage 1 (School)	Yes
UG	Management	Current Student	School based complaint - matter of communication	Upheld	Yes
PhD	Geography & Geoscience	Current Student	School based complaint - Matter of supervision	SPSO – Student Complaint was a matter of their appeal. Student directed to SPSO	Yes

Course Type	Faculty	CATEGORIES	Reason for Appeal/Complaint	Outcome	Closed within time
UG	Psychology	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of supervision	not upheld	Yes
PG	Psychology	Current Student	School based Complaint - Matter of communication	not upheld	Yes
UG	Biology	Current Student	School based complaint - Policy	upheld	Yes