UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE
1 YEAR REVIEW

1. 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back to the line management (Stage 1), 2 referred to the separate academic appeals process, and 3 complaints were withdrawn and 1 was directed to the SPSO.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 handers.

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

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<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>School/Unit</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Outcome: resolved</th>
<th>Outcome: escalated</th>
<th>Outcome: other</th>
<th>Action within timeframe</th>
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| Upfiel | Agoie of Minimum Admission Standards - School Board Compliant | Student | Medicine | UG |

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| Course Type | Faculty | Categories | Reason For Appeal | Complainant | Outcome | NA | NA |

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