

THE UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE – A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

We are committed to providing an excellent education and high quality services to our students from enrolment to graduation, and we continuously seek to improve the student experience. Therefore, if something does go wrong or you have reason to be dissatisfied with what we are providing, please tell us. You should feel free to raise matters of legitimate concern without risk of disadvantage. This leaflet describes our complaint procedure and how to make a complaint. Full information on the University's complaints handling procedure is available at the following link: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/administration/complaints/>.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

What can I complain about?

If you have good reason, you can complain about things like:

- the quality and standard of any service we provide;
- failure to provide a service;
- the quality of our facilities or learning resources;
- unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviour by a student or staff member;
- the failure of the University to follow an appropriate administrative process;
- dissatisfaction with University policies, although such policies are set at the University's discretion after due process.

Your complaint may involve more than one aspect of the above, more than one academic School or service unit or someone working on our behalf.

What can't I complain about?

There are some things that we can't deal with through our complaint handling procedure. These include:

- a routine, first-time request for a service;
- a request under Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act or Data Protection Act;
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice;
- an appeal seeking a review of an academic decision on assessment, progression, completion or admission;
- an issue which is being, or has been, by a court or tribunal;
- a request for compensation only;
- an attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision after an investigation.

We will not normally treat information received through routine feedback mechanisms, such as responses to questionnaires, as complaints.

If other procedures or rights of appeal may help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

Who can complain?

Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by the services of the University can make a complaint to us. We encourage anyone with a complaint to approach us directly, but can accept a complaint made on your behalf (e.g. through a University representative, a friend or a family member) provided you give us your clear written authority to liaise with your representative, and provided you also give them clear authority to act on your behalf.

How do I complain?

You can complain in person, by phone, in writing, or by email. It is easier for us to resolve complaints if you raise them as soon as you become aware of the issue, and directly to the service concerned. Please talk to a member of staff within the School or unit you are complaining about so that they can try to resolve any problems on the spot.

When complaining, please provide us with the following information:

- your full name, address and matriculation number;
- as much as you can about the complaint;
- what has gone wrong;
- a clear statement of how you would like us to resolve the matter.

Is there a time limit for making a complaint?

It is best to resolve issues promptly, but in any case you must normally make your complaint within six months of:

- the issue arising, or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain.

Only in exceptional circumstances are we able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, you must tell us why.

What will happen if I complain?

Our complaint procedure has two stages:

Stage 1 – Frontline Resolution

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an on-the-spot explanation or apology if something has clearly gone wrong and immediate action to try to resolve the problem.

Where possible, you should raise your concerns with the relevant staff member. This can be done face-to-face, by phone, in writing or by email. We will give you our decision at Stage 1 within five working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If you are not satisfied with the response we give you at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you so choose, you can take your complaint to Stage 2 of the complaint procedure. You may do this immediately or shortly after you get our initial decision.

Stage 2 – Complaint Investigation

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that are complex and require detailed investigation. We have a [complaint form](#), which will help you to state your complaint clearly to us. Although we will also accept complaints that are made in person or on the phone, we will expect you to complete the complaint form in the interests of clarity and in order to best assist the investigation process. If required, we can help you complete the form. The complaint form and any supporting documents will be seen by the relevant staff in the department(s)/units being complained about.

When using Stage 2 we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days;
- be willing to discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied and what outcome you are looking for;
- give you a full response to the complaint as soon as possible and within 20 working days.

If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will agree revised time limits with you and keep you updated on the progress of your complaint.

What if I'm still dissatisfied?

After we have fully investigated your complaint, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it. Our letter advising you of our decision on your complaint will give you information on how to contact the SPSO; their website is www.spsso.org.uk.

Please note that the SPSO indicates on its website that it *cannot* look at any of the following:

- the exercise of academic judgement
- the quality of teaching or assessment
- grades or a final award

The SPSO states: "We can't assess or challenge the merits of academic decisions. We cannot get your grades changed or have a college or university make a final award."

Getting help to make your complaint

We strongly encourage any student considering making a complaint to consult the [Student Advocate \(Education\) at the Students' Association](#) for independent and impartial advice.

The Student Advocate can:

- help you decide whether making a complaint is the best course of action, or whether another procedure may be more appropriate;
- explain how the complaint procedure works and what the potential outcome(s) may be;
- read drafts of any correspondence you write to the University (including complaint forms), to help you make your case as clearly as possible;
- support you at any meetings you attend with University staff in relation to your complaint.

You can also contact the Advice & Support Centre (ASC) who can provide you with confidential support and advice and/or direct you in the most appropriate direction.

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all students. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another format, such as large format, large font or Braille, please let us know. You can contact us by emailing complaints@st-andrews.ac.uk, calling 01334-462555, or writing to The Complaints Office, College Gate, North Street, St Andrews KY16 9AJ.

For a quick guide to our complaint procedure please see the diagram below:

