

# University of Stirling

## Complaint Handling 2016/17

### Introduction

1. The University operates its complaints handling in line with the *Scottish Higher Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure* published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).
2. This report provides a summary of complaints handling during 2016/17 (1<sup>st</sup> August 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017).

### Overview of the Complaints Handling Procedure

3. The University's Complaints Handling Procedure involves up to two stages.

#### Stage One – Frontline resolution

Seeks to resolve straightforward complaints swiftly and effectively at the source of the concern or issue.

#### Stage Two – Investigation

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.

These two stages represent the full scope of the University's procedure. Where a complainant remains dissatisfied at the conclusion of the University's complaints process, a request can be made to the SPSO for an independent review of the complaint. The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about universities in Scotland.

### Numbers of Complaints

4. During the 2016/17 academic year the University received a total of 70 Stage One, frontline complaints, and a further four Stage Two complaints. All Stage Two complaints were dealt with as Stage Two complaints in the first instance due to the nature of the complaints, in accordance with the procedure. One complaint was withdrawn by the complainant after the original submission.
5. The total number of individual complaints handled was therefore 74.
6. The difference in the volume of Stage One and Stage Two complaints indicates that the majority are resolved through frontline resolution (Stage One), in keeping with the University's aims for early and satisfactory resolution.

## **Complaint Response**

7. The objective set out in the model complaints handling procedure is to resolve Stage One, frontline complaints within five working days, and Stage Two complaints within 20 working days.
8. However there are circumstances when it is not possible to resolve more complex complaints within this timescale. The University's consistent objective is to consider and respond to complaints thoroughly and effectively.
9. In 2016/17, 38 Stage One complaints were responded to within the first five working days, the responses for 13 took more than 20 working days. The average time to respond to Stage One complaints was nine working days.
10. In respect of Stage Two complaints, all four complaints received in 2016/17 took over 20 working days to respond to. The average response time was 63.2 working days.

## **Outcomes**

11. In terms of outcomes of Stage One complaints, two were Upheld, three were Partially Upheld and 64 were Not Upheld.
12. At Stage Two there was one complaint Upheld, one Partially Upheld and two Not Upheld.
13. No complaints were referred to the SPSO in 2016/17.

## **Learning from Complaints**

14. As part of the complaints process, University teams are routinely requested to reflect on the outcomes of individual complaints and consider any lessons that can be learnt.
15. Where Stage Two investigations identify areas of practice that could be improved or enhanced, recommendations are made within the complaint response, and progressed by the relevant faculty or directorate.
16. On an ongoing basis, complaints are reviewed in order to determine any trends. Where a recurring theme is identified, this is highlighted and discussed with the appropriate area, or within a University forum.