

University of Stirling

Complaint Handling 2017/18

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 2017/18 (1st August 2017 to 31st July 2018).

Overview of our 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.

Number of complaints received

4. During the 2017/18 academic year the University had a total of 137 Stage One, frontline complaints, and a further 17 Stage Two complaints. Of the Stage Two complaints, four had been dealt with as Stage One complaints and were subsequently escalated to Stage Two and 13 were dealt with as Stage Two complaints in the first instance due to the nature of the complaints, in accordance with the procedure. A further six complaints were withdrawn by the complainant after the original submission and one was referred to be progressed through other appropriate procedures.
5. The total number of individual complaints handled was therefore 154.
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 2017/18, 50 Stage One complaints were responded to within the first five days, the responses for nine took more than 20 days. The average time to respond to Stage One complaints was 11 days.
10. In respect of Stage Two complaints, three were responded to within the first 20 working days and 14 took over 20 working days to respond to. The average response time was 43.8 working days.

Outcomes

11. In terms of outcomes of Stage One complaints, 24 were Upheld, 63 were partially Upheld and 50 were Not Upheld.
12. At Stage Two there was one complaint Upheld, 7 Partially Upheld and 9 Not Upheld.
13. No complaints were referred to the SPSO in 2017/18.

Learning from complaints

14. As part of the complaints process, the University teams are routinely requested to reflect on the outcome of the 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