University of Stirling Complaints Handling Procedure

Guide to Making a Complaint

Introduction
The University is committed to providing an excellent experience and high quality services to our students and other members of our community including members of the public and applicants. We recognise however that situations may occasionally arise where a member of the University community feels that the level of service they have received has not met expectations.

This Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) sets out the process that the University follows where a complaint is received. A copy of the CHP can be accessed at www.stir.ac.uk/complaints.

This guide accompanies the CHP and provides answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) in order to support anyone who is considering making a complaint.

FAQs

What is a complaint?
We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

How has the University developed its Complaints Handling Procedure?
Universities in Scotland are required to adopt, “The Scottish Higher Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure” published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). This approach seeks to ensure a common, standardised procedure and approach to handling complaints for all Higher Education Institutions in Scotland. The University of Stirling Complaints Handling Procedure has been adapted in order to ensure it is appropriate to the University, in line with the provisions of the model procedure.

Who can make a complaint?
Anyone who receives, requests or is affected by the services of the University can make a complaint to us. If you are not able to complain in person you may nominate someone to act on your behalf. The University can progress complaints submitted by someone on your behalf, where you provide us with your written consent to liaise with your representative.
**What can I make a complaint about?**
You can complain about things like:
- the quality and standard of any service we provide or fail to provide
- the quality of our facilities and learning resources
- the quality and standards of academic services and personal support services available to you
- failure of the University to follow an appropriate administrative processes
- unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviour by a student or staff member.
Your complaint may involve more than one of the above services/departments or be about someone working on our behalf.

**What can't I make a complaint about?**
There are some things we can’t deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include:
- a routine first-time request for a service
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- a request under freedom of information or data protection legislation
- requests for compensation from the University
- things that are covered by academic appeals, such as academic judgements on assessments
- an issue which is being, or has been, considered by a court or tribunal
- an attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision following an investigation.

Some matters cannot be handled under the Complaints Procedure (e.g. a challenge to an academic decision should be raised as an academic appeal not a complaint). If another procedure or right of appeal could help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

**How do I make a complaint?**
You can complain in person, by phone, in writing, email using our Complaints Form which can be found at [www.stir.ac.uk/complaints](http://www.stir.ac.uk/complaints).

It is easier for us to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff within the area of the University that your complain relates to so that they can try to resolve it.

In some cases, particularly those where the complaint is complex, we may ask you to first complete the Complaint Form so that the complaint can be effectively considered and where required, a detailed investigation can be undertaken. This is for your benefit as it not only allows you to fully identify the substance of your complaint, it also allows you to clearly identify the outcomes you are seeking from the complaint investigation. This will greatly help with the investigation.
**How long do I have to make a complaint?**

Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:
- the issue arising, or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain.

In exceptional circumstances, we may consider a complaint after the time limit. If you would like to complain beyond the six months timescale, please complete the Complaint Form and provide detail as to the reasons for the delay.

**What happens if I make a complaint?**

Our Complaints Handling Procedure has up to two stages:

**Stage One – Frontline Resolution**

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, and immediate action to resolve the problem. Where possible, your concerns should be raised 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 One in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

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

**Stage Two – Investigation**

Stage Two deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage One 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 encourage you to complete the complaint form in the interests of clarity and in order to best assist the investigation process. The complaint form and any supporting documents will be seen by the person investigating your complaints, by anyone named in the complaint and by relevant staff in the department(s) being complained about.

When using Stage Two we will:
- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days and tell you who is dealing with your complaint
- 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 progress.

Stage Two complaints should be submitted to complaints@stir.ac.uk or in writing to:

The Complaints Coordinator
Academic Registry
University of Stirling
Cottrell Building Stirling
FK9 4LA

What if I’m still dissatisfied even after the University has considered my complaint?
After we have fully investigated, 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.

The SPSO cannot normally look at:
- a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure. You should therefore make sure it has done so before contacting the SPSO;
- events that happened, or that you became aware of, more than a year ago;
- a matter that has been or is being considered in court;
- the exercise of academic judgement;
- grades or a final award.

The contact details for the SPSO are provided in the Complaints Handling Procedure.

Can I get any help in making a complaint?
The Complaints Coordinator is available to answer any questions about making a complaint, and ensures that complainants are treated fairly and receive timely communications regarding the progress of their complaint.
Students who wish to make a complaint can also access support the Students’ Union, who can:
- help you decide whether making a complaint is the best course of action
- explain how the complaint procedure works, and what the potential outcomes 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 meetings you attend with University staff in relation to your complaint if requested.
You can contact the Students’ Union at:
University of Stirling Students’ Union
The Robbins Centre
University of Stirling
FK9 4LA
email: theunion@stir.ac.uk
phone: 01786 467166

We are committed to making our service accessible to all members of the University community. If you would like any assistance in making a complaint, please don’t hesitate to contact us either by e-mail at complaints@stir.ac.uk or in writing to:

The Complaints Coordinator
Academic Registry
University of Stirling
Cottrell Building
Stirling
FK9 4LA

If I make a complaint will it count against me?
The University is committed to ensuring that no student who raises a genuine complaint will be penalized or disadvantaged. For example, members of staff involved in handling the various stages of the complaints procedure are required to ensure the action of raising a complaint does not influence the assessment of a student’s academic work or the manner in which the student is treated. Furthermore, complaints are handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality and information is provided only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint.
Quick Guide to the Complaints Handling Procedure

Complaints procedure
You can make your complaint in writing, in person, by phone or by e-mail.

We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always work to consider and respond to your complaint thoroughly and quickly. If it is clear that the matter will need a detailed investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.

Stage 1: Frontline Resolution
We will always try to resolve your complaint quickly, within **five working days** if we can.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2.

Stage 2: Investigation
We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1. We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear that they are complex or need detailed investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **three working days**. We will give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days** unless there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it. We will tell you how to do this when we send you our final decision.