

# [College] complaints procedure - a guide for students

**[Name of College]** is committed to providing high-quality customer services.

**We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services.**

If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us. This leaflet describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about our service standards and what you can expect from us.

## What is a complaint?

We regard a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more customers about the college's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by the college or on its behalf.

## What can I complain about?

You can complain about things like:

- a failure to provide a service
- an inadequate quality or standard of service
- the admissions process
- the disciplinary process
- a request for a service or for information which we have not actioned or answered
- our policies
- wrong information about academic programmes or our services
- the quality and availability of facilities and learning resources
- accessibility of our buildings or services
- the behaviour of a member of staff or contractor
- a student's behaviour
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor
- disagreement with a decision where you cannot use another procedure (such as an appeal) to resolve the matter
- our failure to follow the proper administrative process.

Your complaint may involve more than one college service or be about someone working on our behalf, such as a contractor.

## What can't I complain 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 disagreement with academic judgement
- a claim for compensation against the college
- issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or tribunal
- disagreement with a decision where a right of appeal exists, for example the academic appeals process
- a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information Acts
- a grievance by a member of staff
- an attempt to have us reopen or reconsider a complaint we have concluded or given our final decision on.

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

## Who can complain?

Anyone can make a complaint to us, including the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service. Please also read the section on 'Getting help to make your complaint'.

## How do I complain?

You can complain in person, by phone, in writing, by email, or by using our complaints form **[LINK if available]**.

It is easier for us to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the college service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff in the department you are complaining about. Then they can try to resolve any problems on the spot.

When complaining, tell us:

- your full name and address
- as much as you can about the complaint
- what has gone wrong
- how you want us to resolve the matter.

## How long do I have to make a complaint?

Normally, you must make your complaint:

- within six months of the event you want to complain about, or
- within six months of finding out that you have a reason to complain, as long as this is no longer than 12 months after the event itself.

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

## Contact details

***[College to insert contact details]***

## What happens when I have complained?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint.  
Our complaints procedure has 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.

We will give you our decision at Stage 1 in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If we can't resolve your complaint at this stage, we will explain why and tell you what you can do next. We might suggest that you take your complaint to Stage 2. You may choose to do this immediately or shortly after you get our initial decision.

### Stage two: **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.

When using Stage 2 we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days
- where appropriate, 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.

## What if I'm still dissatisfied?

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) or the Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA) (or other awarding body) to look at it. For qualifications that are regulated, if you remain dissatisfied with the way the awarding body has handled your complaint then you may complain to the qualifications regulator, SQA Accreditation.

The SPSO does not have the power to revise course awards. Only the SQA and other awarding bodies have the power to do this and students should always approach the SQA or other awarding body through the relevant procedure where this is what they want to achieve as a result of their complaint, following completion of [the college's] complaint procedure.

The SPSO consider complaints about the quality of service and maladministration, which may include issues surrounding course delivery.

Further information on who to approach about your complaint is available from [name of college].

**In all cases, the complaint must first have been considered by the college.**

The SPSO **cannot** normally look at:

- a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure (**so please 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.

You can contact the SPSO:

**in person**     **SPSO**  
**4 Melville Street**  
**Edinburgh**  
**EH3 7NS**

**by post**        **SPSO**  
**Freepost EH641**  
**Edinburgh**  
**EH3 0BR**

Freephone **0800 377 7330**

Online contact **[www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us)**

Website **[www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)**

Mobile site: **<http://m.spsso.org.uk>**

**[For Colleges:** Please note that SPSO and SQA have been in discussions about signposting arrangements to be included in the model CHP.

*The SPSO Act 2002 requires colleges to signpost to the SPSO on conclusion of their complaints procedure. Awarding bodies and regulators similarly require that colleges advise candidates of the right to raise their complaint with the qualification's awarding body if they remain dissatisfied by the college's response. Candidates can also raise matters with the appropriate regulator should they be dissatisfied by the awarding body's handling of the complaint.*

*The SPSO and the SQA have been working together to ensure that colleges can comply both with SPSO's legislation and, in specific circumstances, with the regulations and criteria of awarding bodies, and additionally, with those of qualifications regulators.*

*We are currently developing a protocol for handling complaints about courses and assessment to ensure that there is a clear and transparent mechanism for handling complaints within the further education sector. The protocol will also include published turnaround times for all procedures to make clear that there is a focus on as short a complaints procedure as possible. It will include scenarios about the potential types of complaint that should be considered by either SPSO or an awarding body. **In all cases, the complaint must first have been considered by the college.***

*This information will be provided to develop a standardised approach for the sector to advise students how and to whom to address their complaint if they remain dissatisfied by a college's handling of their issue.*

*Both organisations are committed to ensuring that students can raise complaints easily and have their complaints responded to as quickly and simply as possible. It is particularly important that they get access to the appropriate body depending on the desired outcome of their complaint.]*

## Getting help to make your complaint

We understand that you may be unable, or reluctant, to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.

You can find out about advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance.

### Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

Tel: **0131 260 5380** Fax: **0131 260 5381** Website: [www.siaa.org.uk](http://www.siaa.org.uk)

We are committed to making our services easy to use for everyone. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure we make reasonable adjustments to help customers access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font or Braille, please tell us in person, contact us on [x], email us at [x] or text us at [x].

## Our contact details

Please contact us by the following means:

**[College to specify appropriate means of contact]**

We can also give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as **large print**, audio and Braille).

## Quick guide to our complaints procedure

### Complaints procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing.  
We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But 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 handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO (or awarding body) to consider it.

We will tell you how to do this when we send you our final decision.

**SPSO** Scottish  
Public  
Services  
Ombudsman

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