

A guide for staff – the Complaints Handling Procedure

The right to complain

The University is committed to providing the highest level of service, both for its students and for other members of the public who may have contact with the University. Although we aim to offer excellent services and value for money, we are aware that we may occasionally get it wrong. If someone feels that the services and treatment we have provided fall short of reasonable expectations, we would like them to let us know. This will assist us to provide more efficient and improved services in the future, enabling us to:

- put things right;
- learn from our mistakes, and;
- improve our services.

The University is strongly committed to maintaining an effective complaints handling procedure which allows all members of our community to make a legitimate complaint and aims to investigate all complaints fairly, consistently and confidentially. In line with other Scottish universities, we have introduced a standardised complaints handling procedure. This leaflet provides an employee's guide to the University's Complaints Handling Procedure.

Who can complain?

There will be occasions where someone is reluctant or unwilling to make a complaint on their own. Please note that complaints cannot be made on someone else's behalf unless they are legally responsible for the complainant or unless the complainant is unable to make the complaint themselves (e.g. for reasons of disability). The University will consider anonymous complaints if there is enough information in the complaint to enable the University to make further enquiries. If the complaint does not provide enough information to support further action, the University may decide not to pursue the matter. The University will, however, give consideration to the issues raised.

What can be complained about?

Problems or concerns that may be brought to your attention under the complaints procedure could relate to:

- the quality and standard of the teaching and learning experience;
- the quality of our facilities and learning resources;
- the quality and standards of academic services and personal support services available;
- the quality and standards of administrative processes;
- unfair treatment by a student, staff member or contractor;
- unacceptable behaviour by a student, staff member or contractor.

What is not a complaint?

The definition of a complaint is very broad; however, not every concern raised with the University is a

complaint. For example, a complaint is not:

- a request under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 or Data Protection Act 1998
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- a request for compensation only
- a response to an invitation to provide feedback through a formal mechanism such as a questionnaire or committee membership will generally not be treated as a complaint
- an insurance claim
- an issue which is being, or has been, considered by a court or tribunal
- an attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where the University's procedure has been completed and a decision has been issued
- a grievance by a member of staff which is eligible for handling through the grievance procedure
- an appeal about an academic decision on assessment or admission.

These issues will be dealt with under alternative appropriate processes rather than under the complaints handling procedure. It should be noted, however, that some situations can involve a combination of issues, some are complaints and others are not, and each case should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

What to do when someone complains

The Complaints Handling Procedure is made up of two stages:

- Frontline Resolution;
- Investigation.

Frontline Resolution

Frontline Resolution is the stage at which you, as a member of staff, are most likely to be involved.

The University believes that most complaints can be resolved quickly, informally and at the time of the first occurrence. Complainants are asked to discuss their concerns with the relevant staff member, who could be a programme tutor, student programme/school representative, an academic member of staff, a school administrator, or a service unit representative. Complainants are advised that this can be done face-to-face, by phone, in writing or by email. If a complainant later formalises their complaint, they will be asked to demonstrate the steps they took to resolve the matter informally.

The University aims to resolve all complaints subject to the frontline resolution process as close as possible to the initial point of contact and within **5 working days**. Generally these will be the more straightforward complaints where the staff member receiving the complaint will be able to resolve the matter on the spot by providing an explanation or apology and taking action to put the matter right, or taking other action to resolve the complaint quickly.

At this stage it is not always necessary to respond to the complainant in writing. Many complaints will be able to be resolved orally, face to face or by telephone, and that is all that is needed. There may, however, be occasions where you do have to

provide the decision in writing. Generally you should do so if the complainant these should be used as supplied asks for this or if you think it would help to confirm or clarify the facts or outcome of the complaint for the complainant or for the University.

In exceptional circumstances, it is possible to extend this 5 working day period with (as required by the SPSO) the complainant's and a senior manager's agreement, but the SPSO requires that going over the 5 working days must still be recorded and reported as outwith the target timescales. The reasons for delay should be explained to the complainant, plus any revised timescale, and the SPSO stipulates that 10 working days is the maximum duration at Frontline.

The complaint details, the action taken and outcome of complaints at this stage should always be recorded using the frontline resolution complaint recording form; this information is used for monitoring, and for service improvements.

Investigation

If a complainant is not satisfied with the response at the frontline resolution stage, they should submit a formal complaint in writing (using the Complaint Investigation Request Form) to Academic Registry, Abertay University, , Bell Street, Dundee DD1 1HG. Academic Registry can provide a copy of the form for this when required.

In some cases, exceptionally, the normal 20 working days may not be long enough to investigate the complaint sufficiently, and if so the complainant should be kept up to date with the reasons for delay and provided with a revised timescale for completion. A senior manager must approve any extension to this timescale. The SPSO requires that the complainant should agree this as well, but there is provision for senior management to affirm the proposed extension if (in effect) the complainant declines unreasonably to do so.

The University will acknowledge receipt of the completed form within 3 working days and an Investigating Officer will carry out an investigation of the complaint.

What should I do?

As soon as the Frontline Resolution stage has been completed, please complete all the details in the frontline resolution complaint recording form (available from the Academic Registry Intranet complaints page) and send it to complaints@abertay.ac.uk. This should be done by the member of staff who dealt with the complaint at the frontline resolution stage. Please note that the recording of these details is required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, and that the University is required to publish information about complaints and their handling.

Do's and Don'ts when dealing with a complaint

Do:

- be aware of your responsibility to try to resolve the complaint or seek assistance to resolve it;
- be aware of service procedures;
- be sensitive - making a complaint can be stressful, so respond with courtesy, tact and empathy;
- • listen carefully to what the complainant is saying without interrupting. This helps

you to get the details right first time and shows that you are taking the matter seriously. Take notes and read them back to check that you understood the problem;

- ask open-ended questions to get more detailed information, this sometimes helps you to find a solution that will satisfy the complainant;
- provide an apology and explanation when it is clear we have made a mistake;
- make sure that a course of action is agreed that is satisfactory to the complainant and to the School or service. If you are in doubt discuss the matter with your line manager;
- check that the action agreed upon was carried out, then follow up by contacting the complainant to confirm the action with them;
- explain the next stage of the procedure if the problem hasn't been resolved;
- record all details of the complaint in line with the appropriate procedures;
- treat all information in confidence.

Don't:

- refuse to accept there is a problem, if the complainant thinks there is a problem, you must help;
- be defensive or argue;
- jump to conclusions; wait until you have the whole story;
- make promises you can't keep.

Who should I contact for advice?

Academic Registry, Location: Abertay University, Bell Street, Dundee DD1 1 HG
Tel: 01382 308000 Email: complaints@abertay.ac.uk

Other useful contacts

Support Enquiry Zone, Location: Level 1, The Bernard King Library, Abertay University, Bell Street. Tel. 01382 308000 Email: sez@abertay.ac.uk

Student Services, Location: Level 2, The Bernard King Library, Bell Street Tel: 01382 308000 Email: studentservices@abertay.ac.uk

University of Abertay Dundee Students' Association Location (office): Kydd Building, Bell Street, Abertay University Tel: 01382 308000

Training

For training, please visit the University's web pages on complaints. Training resources are available to you on the University's external website (search: complaints) and on the Academic Registry intranet page for complaints.