

Student Complaints | | Staff Guidelines¹



Formal Review by Head of School/Unit – Stage 1

Actions under local resolution include review by the relevant Head of School/Unit, where a student is not satisfied with the initial response received. The [Student Complaint Form: Head of School/Unit Review](#) should be completed in such cases.

- If a Head of School/Unit finds that they have a conflict of interest in relation to a Stage 1 complaint, for example where the matter complained of directly relates to their own actions or interactions with the student raising the complaint, the Stage 1 review is conducted and the formal response is provided by the Head of School/Unit's line manager or their line manager's nominee.
- Heads of School/Unit may delegate consideration of a Stage 1 complaint to a relevant staff member. However, the Head of Unit/School retains responsibility and must approve the findings and proposed response.

Reviewing Stage 1 complaints

- When reviewing complaints, Heads of School/Unit should apply a compassionate approach to understanding and responding to the issues raised by the student.
- If an individual staff member is named in a complaint, Heads of School/Unit should be aware that this may be a source of anxiety and should adopt a sensitive approach when reviewing the issues raised in the complaint with the staff member, signposting available supports if required.
- Where possible, face-to-face discussions should be held separately with the student, and any relevant member of staff, to be clear about the exact nature of the complaint, what the student is trying to achieve and that the issues fall within the scope of the Student Complaint process.
- Heads of School/Unit should review any documentation supplied by the student, and any information provided by any relevant member of staff.
- Heads of School/Unit are not required to appoint an investigator to conduct a full investigation of the complaint at Stage 1 but for complex complaints may find it useful to construct a chronology of what has occurred, on the basis of material submitted and discussions with the student and relevant staff members.
- In reviewing the complaint Heads of School/Unit should establish, based on the available information, what happened and what should have happened, and whether the complaint should be upheld. Heads of School/Unit should be conscious of their own biases and any potential impact they may have on their review of the complaint.

¹ The guidelines are informed by guidance and resource materials produced by the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#); University of Dundee [Student Complaint Guidance](#); Glasgow Caledonian University [Student Complaint Guidance](#); University of Glasgow [Student Complaint Guidance](#).

Providing a Stage 1 Response

- Heads of School/Unit are required to communicate formally in writing the outcome of the review to the student within **15 working days**. This communication should address any issues raised by the student that fall within the scope of the Student Complaint Policy.
- Where the timeframe of 15 working days for resolving the complaint cannot be met, they should update the student and any staff members named as respondents, outlining the reasons for the delay and when it is anticipated that the outcome will be available instead.
- The communication should include a full response to the student's expressed dissatisfaction, with reference to the specific action to address the issue sought by the student and provide a clear explanation for the decision reached.
- The response should reflect understanding of the student's circumstances and issues that they have experienced. This demonstrates that the impact of the circumstances on the student has been considered in the review of the complaint.
- The response should be written in a manner that is clear and easy to understand and is person-centred and non-confrontational.
- An apology should be included if things have gone wrong. [The Ombudsman's guide to making a meaningful apology](#) provides useful guidance in this area.
- Careful checking of the response is recommended to avoid any errors.
- The formal response must inform the student that if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of this process they may submit a complaint to the University's Student Complaints Officer for formal investigation (Stage 2), including a link to [online information on the process](#), highlighting the timeframe within which the complaint must be normally be raised (ie no more than 15 working days from the date of the email sent informing them of the outcome).

Reporting

Heads of School/Unit are required to report annually to Academic Council Committee on Student Appeals and Complaints (ACCSAC) on the number of Stage 1 complaints received; student status of complainants; complaint category; outcome of the complaint; timescale in which a formal response was provided and nature of Stage 1 Student Complaints received. Details identifying individual students or staff are not reported to ACCSAC.

Further information

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