

## **Quick Guide to the University's Complaints Procedure: Stage 1 Complaints**

Information and Guidance is available on the Complaints Resolution Office website under 'Information for Staff – Complaints' <https://www.gla.ac.uk/connect/complaints/staff/>

**All staff** are required to be aware of this Procedure, which was introduced on 14 August 2013. The terms of the Complaints Procedure have been set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and compliance is a condition of the SFC Funding Agreement.

- The Procedure has two stages: Stage 1 'frontline resolution' (handled locally) and Stage 2 'investigation' (managed by Complaints Resolution Office, investigated by an appointed investigating officer).
- We are required to provide the University's response to complaints within five working days (at Stage 1) and within 20 working days (at Stage 2). Therefore, it is very important that when a complaint is received action is taken promptly.

### **1. What is a complaint?**

A complaint is defined as: 'An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more individuals about the standard of service, action or lack of action by or on behalf of the University.'

#### **A complaint is NOT:**

- a first-time request for a service;
- an issue that should be dealt with under another procedure (e.g. an academic appeal, a staff Grievance) [See Further information on Complaints website at: 'Which Procedure should I use?'];
- issues raised through routine feedback exercises (e.g. questionnaires, Annual Monitoring, Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings).

The Procedure states that a complaint does not need to be in writing, so you may receive a complaint by telephone or in person.

For further information on what constitutes a complaint please see Complaints Resolution Office website: 'What is a complaint?'

### **2. I have received a complaint, but I don't think it can be addressed in five working days**

You may consider that the complaint is so complex that it cannot be resolved within five working days. For example, it may be obvious that several people will need to be consulted before an appropriate response can be provided or there is a large amount of documentation to be considered. In this case, you can seek an extension to ten days under Stage 1 or the complaint should be referred immediately to Stage 2 of the Procedure. Please contact the Complaints Resolution Office by e-mailing [complaints@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@glasgow.ac.uk) or by phoning ext. 6441.

### **3. I am not the best person to respond to the complaint**

The Complaints Procedure allows a complaint to be made to any member of staff. The person who receives the complaint therefore may not be best placed to address it.

However, if the complaint has been made to you, you must identify who should deal with it and agree with that person that you will refer the complaint to them. It is not enough to tell the complainant that he or she needs to raise the complaint with someone else. If you are not sure who should deal with the complaint, discuss it with your line manager.

#### **4. I am the appropriate person to handle the complaint. What should I do?**

The emphasis of Stage 1 of the procedure is swift resolution. With a deadline of only five working days for addressing the complaint, the first step is to be sure that you understand the complaint and the remedy being sought. If not, check with the complainant. There may be several elements to the complaint, so you may need input from colleagues who know more about what happened or who will be able to advise what normal procedures are and what would be reasonable. Consult any relevant documentation. Reach a view on whether the complaint is justified. If something has gone wrong, assess what should have happened, whether any remedy or an apology should be offered and whether action needs to be taken to avoid similar situations occurring in the future.

Please be aware that complainants acting on behalf of students will require their permission to be taken forward under the Complaints Procedure, which can be either sent to you in a signed letter or through a student email account and should include the student identification number. Please also note that the deadline for your response is calculated five working days from receipt of the third-party mandate.

If the complaint includes an allegation regarding inappropriate behaviour of a student or staff member (discrimination, harassment, bullying etc.), you should first seek guidance from a member of the Complaints Resolution Office (see Section 7 below) who can confirm details of relevant University policies (Equality & Diversity, Dignity at Work and Study) and provide general advice in terms of the handling the complaint. Complaints Resolution Office staff will be able to advise whether it might be more appropriate to address the matter should be addressed through another University procedure (Student Conduct, Staff Grievance etc.).

It is also important to ensure that both students and staff members are made aware of the full range of advice and support services available to them.

Students should be encouraged to seek advice and support through the SRC Advice Centre (Including specific guidance for students about bullying and harassment and the University's Complaints Procedure), Counselling & Psychological Services or the Complaints Resolution Office.

Advice and support is also available to any member of staff who is the subject of a complaint through their line manager, colleague and through guidance on the Complaints Resolution Office website, which includes details of services offered by the University and external organisations.

Specific guidance for staff accused of harassment and bullying is also available [online](#).

There is also a [Respect Advisers Network](#) which complements existing support structures to help students and staff members gain a better understanding of their rights and options.

## 5. I have reached a conclusion in relation to the complaint. What should I do now?

You should report your conclusion to the complainant. The Complaints Procedure says that this does not have to be in writing. This reflects the aim to address complaints as swiftly as possible. However, if you report in person or by phone, you should follow this up in writing (by post or e-mail), addressing the issues raised, with a summary of your conclusions. You should also state the outcome of your findings (complaint is not upheld, some aspects of the complaint are upheld, or all aspects of the complaint are upheld).

While we recognise that staff members might have concerns regarding potential legal implications of providing an apology, when a complaint, is upheld or partially upheld, it is the University's policy to apologise and provide an appropriate remedy.

The SPSO has provided advice to ensure an apology is genuine, meaningful and effective:

<https://www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance>

You can also make recommendations for service enhancement to ensure that the complaint issue(s) do not reoccur in the future.

In reporting the outcome to a complainant, you must advise them that if they are not satisfied with the outcome they have the right to escalate the matter to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.

The template of a [text](#) for reporting the outcome and giving advice about Stage 2 is available on the 'Information for Staff' section of the Complaints website.

## 6. Log a stage 1 complaint

It is a requirement of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman that the University keeps a record of all complaints. When you have responded to a Stage 1 complaint, please complete and submit the online [form](#). (You may be asked to log in using your GUID.) You will need to provide details of the complainant, the issues raised, the outcome (which in addition to options outlined above includes: complaint is withdrawn; out of time; and the complaint has been referred to another procedure), when the complaint was received and when the response was provided. Please submit the form together with any relevant documents (e.g. letter/e-mail reporting/confirming outcome, complaint form – if one was submitted). The record will be held confidentially in Complaints Resolution Office and the information provided will be used to fulfil our reporting requirements. If you have any problems logging the complaint, please call 6441.

## 7. Contacts and Information

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/connect/complaints/staff/>

Generic e-mail address for complaints-related correspondence:

[complaints@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@glasgow.ac.uk)

Or contact: Michelle Leatham /Ghillian Campbell (ext. 6441)  
Mhairi Evans (ext. 4247)  
Seonaid Dodds (ext. 1959)  
Clare Barnes (ext. 2863)

## Planning a reply to complaint correspondence

Before you set pen to paper, finger to keyboard, work through the four 'C's of effective correspondence to ensure your response is appropriate and well thought-out.

### 1. Clarity of thought

Read the letter carefully, to see what has triggered the correspondence. There is usually one issue which has motivated the writer, even if there are a number of other topics covered throughout.

Take time to think about the writer and to establish who they are and what they really want by asking yourself:

- why has the writer written the letter?
- what do they say they want?
- what do they really want?
- how do you want to appear in your reply to them?
- are there any special considerations in replying e.g. do they have internet access if you're referring them to a website or are they visually impaired? This will impact on the advice you give them.
- if you need to apologise or acknowledge that there has been a problem.

### 2. Clarity of choice

Try to identify as much about the writer as possible, so that your reply sounds like one written by a human, to a fellow human.

Choose a style and tone that is right for the reader and which ensures that it is appropriate for your organisation as well. Make sure the language you use can be understood by the recipient, being especially careful with use of jargon and acronyms.

Now list the points you want to address and then the points you want to make.

Put them in a logical order - each point will usually deserve a paragraph of its own.

### 3. Clear writing

Now draft your reply in your own words, as simply as possible.

Think of ways you can make the letter appear more human, to demonstrate that you have acknowledged the individual who will be opening your response.

You should choose:

- clear familiar language
- plain English with no ambiguity or nuance
- short paragraphs with one idea in each
- short sentences
- a good, clear layout

#### 4. Careful checking

Ideally, put the response to one side for a while, so you can come back to it with a fresh pair of eyes. It's then easier to see mistakes you might have made while drafting, and to assess whether the letter has a good logical flow.

Check for errors in spelling, grammar and expression - especially with headings and names which are often overlooked. A letter or email becomes public property very quickly and any mistakes reflect badly on both you and the organisation.

Things to check include:

- names, titles and correct forms of address
- letters after a name e.g. MP, MBE, AM
- the address
- punctuation and spelling (especially apostrophes)
- facts, figures and dates - to ensure it's up to date and accurate
- consistency with other data supplied,
- inclusion of enclosures - have you put a leaflet into the envelope if you've mentioned it in the response?
- style and tone. Have you answered carefully and with as little bureaucratic language as possible?
- have you answered the question?
- have you followed the correct clearance procedure?
- Have you mentioned anyone in the response who needs to be copied in, to ensure continuity of information?