

For further information and/or a complaint form please contact us:

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This leaflet is available in other languages and formats.

Gàidhlig 中文 (简体字) اردو বাংলা العربية Polski

SPSO Scottish
Public
Services
Ombudsman

got a complaint?

What should you do when you feel you've got a problem and want to complain? Every college or university has a complaints and appeals process that you can use if you feel you have been treated unfairly. You can find support and help in making a complaint from your institution's student union or welfare representatives. Most issues are resolved by the institution but if you are still unhappy you can bring your complaint to the SPSO.

There is more information inside this newsletter about what we do, and the types of complaints we deal with. If you would like to find out more, please visit our website or contact our Outreach Team (details inside).

**Our service is independent,
impartial and free.**



Can I bring my complaint to the SPSO?

The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about most public services in Scotland. We can normally only consider your complaint after you have completed the formal complaints or appeals process of the college or university. This gives them the chance to respond and try to put things right. Your student union will be happy to assist you in making a complaint. This may be particularly helpful for students from outside the UK.

The kind of complaints we can consider about colleges and universities are:

- applications processes for admission
- provision of student support
- student welfare services
- complaints about college or university services
- **the process followed** when considering academic or disciplinary appeals

We cannot look at:

- the exercise of academic judgement
- personnel matters
- contracts and other commercial transactions
- the quality of teaching or assessment
- grades or a final award

When we consider complaints it is not our role to assess or challenge the merits of decisions. Our role is to judge whether there are reasonable procedures in place and to decide whether they have been followed correctly.

Tips for complaining

- Contact your student union or welfare representative who can help you submit your complaint.
- Ensure you keep copies of your letters and responses from the college or university.
- If you are unhappy with the response you receive, write to the person at the next stage of the complaints or appeals procedure. Explain why you are unhappy with the response received and what you would like them to consider.
- Once you have been through the full formal complaints or appeals procedure, and if you are still unhappy, you can bring your complaint to the SPSO.

Contacting us

Once you have completed the formal complaints process with your college or university please call the Outreach Team on **Freephone 0800 377 7330**

One of our Complaints Investigators is always available to speak to you. Please call our Freephone number, or you can visit our office at 4 Melville Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7NS. You don't need to make an appointment. We are open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, apart from Tuesday when we open at 10am.

Please feel free to get in touch with us at any time.

Examples of complaints we have considered

Student Support

The complaint was that a college did not give a student appropriate support and in particular that tutorial provision was inadequate; the circumstances surrounding an audition for a higher-level course were unsatisfactory; as was the way the student was told she was not successful in this application. The woman was also unhappy with the way the College dealt with her subsequent complaint. The complaints were partially upheld to the extent that information provided to students was inaccurate and that there was inconsistency in the way students were informed about the outcome of their auditions. We also found that the College mishandled their response to the complaint. The College accepted our recommendations which included ensuring that the information provided to students about tutorials and the role of the Course Tutor was in line with current practice; reviewing their policy surrounding the methods used to inform applicants of the results of auditions; and reviewing the support and guidance given to staff investigating complaints.

Postgraduate supervision

The complainant, Ms C, claimed that the University had failed to provide her with appropriate supervision and that as a consequence her PhD had been disadvantaged. We found that Ms C did not remain in contact with her supervisors but, instead, continued to work on her thesis without their guidance, and, consequently, submitted work that fell below the required standard. We were satisfied that the University had taken appropriate steps to inform Ms C that her work was not up to the required standard and, therefore, did not uphold the complaint.