

Thinking about complaining?

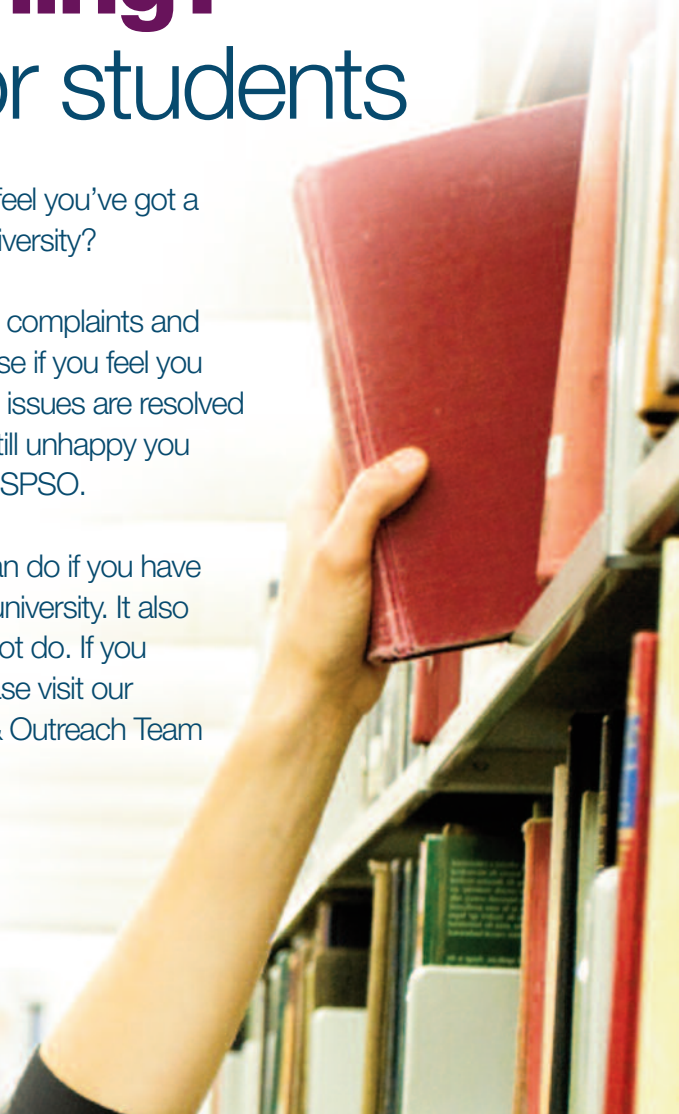
A guide for students

What should you do when you feel you've got a complaint about a college or university?

Every college or university has a complaints and appeals process that you can use if you feel you have been treated unfairly. Most issues are resolved by the institution but if you are still unhappy you can bring your complaint to the SPSO.

This leaflet tells you what you can do if you have a complaint about a college or university. It also explains what we can and cannot do. If you would like to find out more, please visit our website or contact our Advice & Outreach Team (details inside).

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



How do I complain?

What should I do if I have a problem with a service?

If you are unhappy with the service you've received, or if you feel a service wasn't available that should have been, you should report the problem to your college or university. You can find support and help from your institution's student guild/union or welfare representatives. Most issues are resolved but if you are still unhappy you can bring your complaint to us.

I reported the problem and am still unhappy. How do I complain?

You should normally complain to your institution if they have still not dealt with the matter after you reported it. This doesn't just mean telling staff about the problem. It means making a formal complaint telling your college or university that they have not sorted it out. You should approach them direct and ask for details of their complaints procedure.

Please remember that organisations often have more than one stage in their complaints procedure. We usually expect you to have gone through all the stages before we will look at your complaint. This gives the organisation the chance to try to put things right. If you're still unhappy after going through their complaints procedure, or if the time they're taking to look into your complaint is unreasonable, you can complain to us.

What can the SPSO look into and what can't the SPSO look into?

We can look at whether there are reasonable procedures in place and decide whether they have been followed correctly. We could look at complaints about:

- > the applications processes for admissions (but not the admission decision itself)
- > services like accommodation, welfare and support
- > the process followed in 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

And you should note that:

- > **We can't assess or challenge the merits of academic decisions.** We cannot get your grades changed or have a college or university make a final award
- > You cannot appeal an institution's decisions through us
- > You should normally make your complaint to us within 12 months of realising that you think your college or university have done something wrong

How do you put things right?

If we find a fault, as well as putting things right for you we want to try and stop the same thing happening to someone else. That's why some of our decisions and reports also have recommendations. These may include recommending that the institution apologise or change their procedures. We may ask them to return the situation to what it would have been if they'd acted correctly in the first place. We will look carefully at each complaint to see what happened and how you have been affected. Our complaints reviewer will check that the institution carry out our recommendations.

We also make some of our investigations public. We do this to share what we have learnt from complaints and to help improve how public services are delivered in Scotland.

How do I make a complaint to the SPSO?

- Write to us and tell us what happened. It's best to use our complaint form if possible. You can find this on our website at www.spsso.org.uk, where you can fill it in online or print it off to complete. Or phone our Freephone Helpline number on 0800 377 7330 and we will send you one.
- Tell us what went wrong, and what you would like to happen to get things put right.
- Send us copies of the main paperwork about your complaint. Please make sure you send the final response you received from your institution after you complained.

Can someone else make a complaint for me?

Yes, if you give them written permission. Phone us on **0800 377 7330** and ask us for a consent form. Your student guild/union representative or welfare officer may help you. Or you can go to your local Citizens Advice Bureau, where an adviser can help you fill in a complaint form or complain for you. Your Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP), councillor, Member of Parliament (MP) or a friend or relative may also be able to help.

Did you know...?

You can ask your student welfare officer or student guild/union representative for advice. You may find it helpful to contact them at an early stage of your complaint. The university or college will have their contact information. You could also discuss your concerns with your local Citizens Advice Bureau. You can find a list of them on their website: www.cas.org.uk or in the phone book.

You may wish to seek legal advice about whether there is another route for your concerns. The Law Society of Scotland may be able to help you find a solicitor. Visit their website www.lawscot.org.uk or call them on **0131 226 7411**

Call us for advice

If you're not sure whether we can consider your complaint, please contact us. You can also call us if you're not sure whether you have gone through the complaints procedure of the organisation you are unhappy with. If appropriate, we'll guide you through that.

We're happy to talk to you. A complaints reviewer is always available and can discuss whether we can consider your complaint.

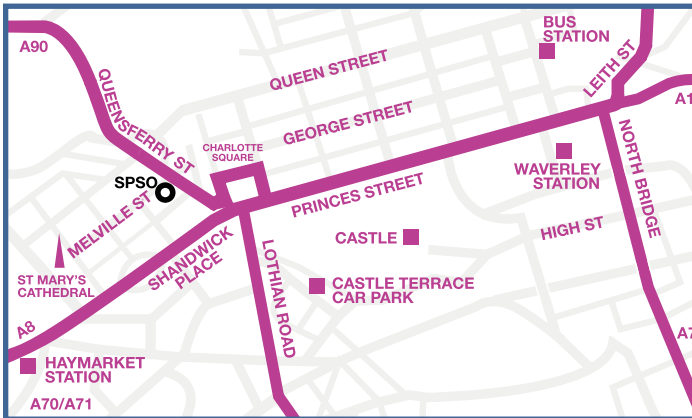
You can contact us by phone, in writing or by visiting our office. You don't need to make an appointment.

SPSO
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7NS

Our Freepost address is:
SPSO
Freepost EH641
Edinburgh
EH3 0BR

Freephone: **0800 377 7330**

Website: **www.spsso.org.uk**



Opening hours

We are open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Tuesday from 10am to 5pm.

We can give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as in large print or in Braille) if you ask.

The information in this leaflet is for general guidance, and was accurate when written. However, you should not rely on it as an authoritative statement of Scots law or of any process/guidance mentioned. SPSO will not accept liability for any consequences resulting from the use of this information. If you want to know more about an organisation mentioned or their processes please contact them direct.

SPSO advice