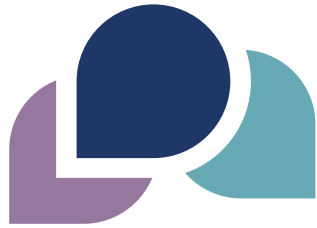


**SCOTTISH  
PUBLIC  
SERVICES  
OMBUDSMAN**



People Centred | Improvement Focused

**Information  
for students**

# **What to do if you have a complaint about a college or university**

SPSO provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about public services in Scotland.

You may feel that a college or university has provided a poor service, failed to provide a service or failed to follow procedures properly. If this has caused you hardship or difficulty, we may be able to look at your complaint.

We can normally only look at complaints about a university or college if you have completed their complaints procedure or the academic appeals procedure.



## Complaining about the university or college

Universities and colleges should have clear separate procedures for complaints and academic appeals. These procedures should include:

- an opportunity to resolve problems at local level
- a stage for investigation and determination of complaints and academic appeals
- a review stage (for academic appeals only).

Your college or university should signpost you to the correct procedure depending on the issue(s) you wish to raise.

## Time limits

There are time limits for submitting a complaint or academic appeal to a college or university. Please check. In exceptional circumstances, the college or university might accept a complaint or appeal after the time limit.

## Getting help

The college or university's students' association can advise and support you. They are there to represent you and your interests. The college or university will have their contact information. If you are an international student, you might find it helpful to contact the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA).

Website: **[www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)**

Advice line: **+4420 7788 9214**

## When to complain to the SPSO

You can complain to us when you have completed the college or university's complaints procedure or academic appeals procedure. The college or university's final response should tell you that you can complain to the SPSO. If it does not, you should contact them for advice on what to do next.

## What the SPSO can and can't do

We can look at whether there are reasonable processes and procedures in place and decide if they have been followed correctly. Unless there are special circumstances, we can't look at issues that happened more than a year from when you first knew of the problem. We cannot question academic judgement. Please see examples on the next page. This is not an exhaustive list.

For more information about how we deal with complaints, **see our website**.

## We can look at

- the process followed for admissions, academic appeals and student disciplinary matters (but not the decision itself)
- services like accommodation, disability and welfare support
- **discrimination** (we consider if the institution has acted reasonably)

## We can't look at

- the quality of teaching, supervision or assessment
- grades or a final award (in relation to academic judgement)
- personnel matters
- contracts and other commercial transactions

## Outcomes

- we can't get your grades changed, but may ask for the correct process to be applied
- we can't make the college or university give you a final award or reinstate you on the course
- we can't determine that an institution has **discriminated against you**, like a court can
- we can't recommend financial compensation like a court can

## Your information

We are committed to protecting your privacy. We use information given to us about you and your complaint for its intended purpose and in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the SPSO Act 2002. We may need to collect and share information with a number of sources to carry out our investigation and we may do this orally, in hard copy or by email. We may report on the outcome of the investigation. When we do so we do not name individuals. We may also use information we collect to compile statistics and undertake research and analysis. There may be public interest benefits in reusing information for these purposes. Information is completely anonymised.

Your views are valuable to us, and we may contact you again to invite you to take part in our surveys for research purposes.

To find out more about how we handle your information and your rights, see our website [www.spsso.org.uk/privacy-notice](http://www.spsso.org.uk/privacy-notice) or ask us for a copy. If you have any concerns about what we do, please let us know straight away.

## How to contact the SPSO



A freepost envelope can be sent to you. Please call us if you need one.



**SPSO, Bridgeside House, 99 McDonald Road, Edinburgh EH7 4NS**

Opening hours: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 9am – 5pm, Tuesday 10am – 5pm. If you would like to visit our office in person, you must arrange an appointment first by phoning 0800 377 7330 or using our online contact form.



Freephone **0800 377 7330**

This line is open during the following hours: Mon, Wed & Fri 9am-1pm, Tues & Thurs 1pm-5pm. Calls outside of these hours can be arranged by appointment using our online contact form.



Website **[www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)**



Online contact form **[www.spsso.org.uk/contact-form](http://www.spsso.org.uk/contact-form)**

You can fill in our complaints form online at **[forms.spsso.org.uk/spsso](http://forms.spsso.org.uk/spsso)**

Calls to and from SPSO phone lines may be recorded to check the quality of our service and help us do our job to help you. More details are in the privacy notice: **[www.spsso.org.uk/privacy-notice](http://www.spsso.org.uk/privacy-notice)**. Please ask if you want to confirm if a call is or is not being recorded or if you would like to know what options may be available to you if you do not wish to be recorded.

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Please contact us if you would like this leaflet in another language or format (such as large print, audio, BSL or Braille).